DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 535 HE 034 845

AUTHOR	Clarke, Marguerite; Shore, Arnold
TITLE	The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions.
INSTITUTION	National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, Chestnut Hill, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	Ford Foundation, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2001-03-00
NOTE	74p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Admission Criteria; *College Admission; *College Applicants; *Diversity (Student); Ethnicity; Higher Education; Minority Groups; Racial Differences; Scores; *Selection; Test Results; Test Use

ABSTRACT

In order to understand the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics (including race and ethnicity) in the admission process, National Board researchers interviewed admissions directors who worked at selective public and private institutions are well as admissions consultants in the summer and fall of 1999. This report presents an overview of the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play at the different stages of the admission process, as identified by the interviewees. The overarching theme is the variety of ways in which selective institutions use test score and diversity information, from tools for marketing and recruitment to information for admissions decision making to foci for support services on campus. Also presented are the strategies that interviewees identified for balancing the effects of these roles on the academic and racial/ethnic composition of the applicant, admitted, enrolled, and retained student body. The report also explores some of the options that colleges have in their use and interpretation of test score and diversity information, and it presents some suggestions about colleges might begin to think about the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics of the admission process. Appendixes contain two interview protocols. (Contains 21 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 464 535

HE

The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions

National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Clarke
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

By Marguerite Clarke and Arnold Shore
Lynch School of Education
Boston College

March 2001

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

NBETPP

The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions

By Marguerite Clarke and Arnold Shore
National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy

Executive Summary

The rollback of affirmative action in several states has moved discussions about minority access to higher education to the forefront of a national debate. In particular, concern has focused on the impact that the lower average performance of minority students on college admission tests might have on their acceptance rates in a race-blind system, particularly at selective colleges.

In order to better understand the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics (including race and ethnicity) in the admission process, National Board researchers interviewed admission directors who worked at selective public and private institutions as well as admissions consultants in the summer and fall of 1999. This report presents an overview of the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play at different stages of the admission process, as identified by our interviewees. The overarching theme is the variety of ways in which selective public and private institutions use test score and diversity information – from tools for marketing and recruitment to information for admissions decision-making to foci for support services on campus - to accommodate the many academic and social goals of institutions for the types of students they hope to attract, enroll, and graduate.

Also presented in this report are strategies that interviewees identified for balancing the effects of these roles on the academic and racial/ethnic composition of the applicant, admitted, enrolled, and retained student body. In addition, we explore some of the options that colleges have in their use and interpretation of test score and diversity information and present some suggestions for how colleges might begin to think about the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in the admission process.

Our overall recommendation is that institutions freely discuss, internally and externally, how they make admission decisions and how student test score and diversity information figure in those decisions. In such discussions, we would hope that the relationship between a college's mission and the way it makes admission decisions would be explored and that policy statements on that relationship would be formulated so as to make clear how student test scores and diversity characteristics are used.

ERRATA FOR:

Clarke, M., and Shore, A. (2001), *The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions*, Chestnut Hill, MA: National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy.

1. On pages 3 and 8, the Fifth Circuit states affected by Hopwood are Texas, Mississippi (NOT Alabama), and Louisiana.

CONTENTS

PAGE

Foreword 3

Chapter One: Introduction 4

The College Admission Process 6

Testing and Diversity in Conflict in the Admission Process 8

Project Overview 9

Report Overview 13

Chapter Two: The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions 14

Before a Student Applies 16

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity 21

During the Application Review 23

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity 34

After a Student is Accepted 38

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity 42

Conclusion 45

Chapter Three: Continuous Improvement in the College Admission Process 46

Using Student Test Score Information 48

Relating test scores to other information 48

Interpreting test scores 49

Publishing/publicizing test score information 50

Relating test score information to financial aid decisions 51

Using Student Diversity Information 51

Types of diversification 51

Levels of diversification 53

Diversity and value added 53

Diversity and organizational structure 54

Chapter Four: Recommendations 55

Appendix A 57

Appendix B 64

FOREWORD

In 1998, two events focused the nation's attention on issues of diversity and college access. The first was a ruling by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals that made it illegal to use a student's race as a factor in college and graduate school admissions in Texas, Alabama, and Louisiana. The second was the passage of analogous legislation in California, Proposition 209. What would happen to minority students' access to college in these race-blind systems? In particular, how would under-represented (i.e., black, Hispanic, and Native American) minority students' lower average performance on college admission tests affect their admission chances at selective institutions? Early answers to these questions suggested that fewer of these students were admitted to selective colleges, fueling a debate among policymakers and activists over the educational and social costs of a less racially diverse student body and what, if anything, to do about it.

The goal of this report is to broaden this debate to include those involved in the daily policy and practice of making admission decisions. In particular, this report aims to engage colleges in public conversations about the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in admission decisions. With this broad audience in mind, we hoped to make the topic of college admissions as accessible as possible. We therefore divided the admission process into three parts – before, during, and after the decision whether to accept or reject a student. We lead the reader through these three stages of the process and highlight the roles of test score and diversity information at each stage. We also provide some vignettes, using fictional applicants and colleges, to illustrate some of the difficult decisions and tensions that face admissions officers every day and the ways in which student test scores and diversity characteristics may affect those decisions.

This monograph is based primarily on interviews we conducted with admissions directors and admissions consultants during the summer and fall of 1999. Suffice it to say that we learned a great deal by talking to these experts. In particular, while we were already familiar with the admission process in general and the continual evaluation of student information that takes place, we had not fully understood how academic institutions are trying to do what so many other institutions are trying to do – be true to their own purposes while meeting broader social goals.

We wish to express our thanks to the many people and organizations who helped with our work: the Ford Foundation for making it financially possible to pursue our research; those who participated in our agenda-setting meeting at the Ford Foundation in December 1998 and who called for the kind of study reported here; our reviewers for their sound advice; and our colleagues at the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy for their feedback and suggestions over the last two years. Most of all, we wish to thank the admissions directors and admissions consultants who gave us their time, wisdom, and insights into the admission process. While we received help and advice from many, the authors alone are responsible for the content of this report and any errors or omissions therein.

Marguerite Clarke and Arnold Shore

National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy

March 2001

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

Every year, a new group of high school seniors study guidebooks and fill in applications, all with the hope of getting into college. By the time they receive their high school diploma, most of them will know whether they will be joining the eight million students currently enrolled in a four-year degree-granting institution or are among the 35 percent of high school graduates who either do not apply to college or apply and are rejected.

Each of these admission decisions is important not only to the students involved, but also to their families, their communities, and society. The fact that Maria gets into Stanford may be a victory not just for Maria, but also for her family (she may be the first to go on to higher education) and for her community (as a Hispanic she belongs to a minority group that is under-represented among college students, particularly in selective colleges). Getting into college is especially important in today's society, as many regard a four-year degree as a necessary step on the road to economic and social success.[1] With the stakes so high, it is hardly surprising that a lot of attention has focused on the process by which college admission decisions are made and the impact of these decisions on access to higher education for different groups of students.

How two kinds of applicant information – test scores and diversity characteristics – affect admission decisions is at the forefront of many of these discussions. Scores on college admission tests are seen by some as a uniform way to compare students from different high school backgrounds and by others as biased measures that unfairly restrict college access for women and minorities.[2] Diversity characteristics are variously regarded as a useful way to ensure the heterogeneity of the student population or as an unfair advantage given to students who might otherwise be deemed inadmissible on the basis of their academic or test performance.[3]

These two kinds of information are often paired in discussions on college admissions since the educational and social goals in question are viewed as conflicting with one another. In particular, an emphasis on test scores (without the use of a student's race or ethnicity as a factor) is believed to reduce the racial and ethnic diversity of the admitted student population (see Box 1).[4] On the other hand, the use of an applicant's race or ethnicity in making admission decisions is believed to result in a student body in which black, Hispanic, and Native American students have lower average test scores than their white and Asian-American peers.

6

Box 1

The Impact of Test Score Differences on the Admission of Minority Students to College: An Illustration

A recent simulation by National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (National Board) researchers illustrated the impact of test score differences on the admission of black students to college.[5] After creating a database that mirrored general patterns of minority and non-minority student performance on college admission tests,[6] the researchers examined the effects of several simple admission rules that depended solely on test scores. A succession of different cut scores was set on the test, and all students scoring above the cut were "accepted," while all those below it were "rejected." While these are too-simple selection rules that no colleges follow (and indeed using them would be inconsistent with accepted professional standards), they are useful in that they isolate the effects of test scores.

In the first scenario, the cut score for admission was set at the overall mean for both groups and equal numbers of black and white applicants were used. Because black applicants have an average score that is well below the overall mean and also lower than that of white applicants, and because their scores vary somewhat less than those of white applicants, a much smaller percentage of black than of white students is accepted: about 20 percent, compared with 55 percent. Use of this cut score causes blacks to be under-represented in the admitted student body by roughly a factor of two relative to their representation in the pool of applicants. Although they constitute half of the applicants, they constitute only 27 percent of the selected students.

In the second scenario, equal numbers of black and white applicants were again used, but the cut score was set much higher – at one standard deviation above the overall mean score for both groups. This reduces the percentage of both black and white applicants accepted. Roughly 17 percent of white students are accepted, compared with 55 percent when the cut score is at the mean. However, only about 1 percent of black students are accepted, compared with about 20 percent when the cut score is at the mean. Raising the cut score also has a dramatic effect on the racial composition of the accepted student population: blacks are under-represented by roughly a factor of eight relative to their representation in the pool of applicants.

These two scenarios show the pure effect of test-based selection, independent of the smaller number of black applicants at most colleges. Comparison of the two shows the effect of greater selectivity. The final scenario maintains the cut score at one standard deviation above the mean but reduces the number of black applicants to a more realistic 15 percent of the total. Because the cut score and the average score for each group remain unchanged, the percentage of black and white students accepted remains the same: about 17 percent of white applicants but only 1 percent of black applicants. The smaller pool of black applicants increases the homogeneity of the accepted student population. While the applicant pool is 15 percent black, the accepted student body is roughly 99 percent white.

These simulations illustrate that when test scores count heavily in admissions, the large differences in scores between black and white students have a major impact both on the probability that black students will be admitted and on the composition of the accepted student population. In addition, these effects become progressively more severe as the selectivity of admissions increases. A parallel simulation for Hispanic students nationwide would show a severe impact, but smaller than that for blacks.

In this report, the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play in college admission decisions are discussed from the perspective of those involved in the daily policy and practice of admissions – i.e., directors of admissions at selective public and private colleges (those that accept 85 percent or less of the students who apply) as well as admissions consultants who help colleges craft their admission practices. While one purpose of the report is to give voice to the opinions of these professionals, its main goal is to encourage colleges to discuss with their public the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play in admission decisions. To that end, this chapter next provides an overview of the college admission process. This is followed by a description of the interview study on which this report is based and an outline of the remaining chapters.

The College Admission Process

Most selective colleges, whether public or private, rely on fairly similar information when deciding which applicants to accept. The differences lie in how much importance is given to the various pieces of information and whether they are used to make decisions for all students or just some. The information used generally includes (not in order of importance):

- *High school achievement: overall high school grade point average (GPA) and/or class rank as well as the high school transcript listing the courses taken*
- *Test scores (see Box 2)*
- *Writing samples: essays and the application forms themselves*
- *Recommendations from the student's high school counselor, teachers, and others*
- *Interview (generally used with only some applicants)*
- *Extra-curricular activities (e.g., community service)*
- *Diversity characteristics: race, ethnicity, geography (see Box 3)*
- *Athletic ability*

How test scores and diversity characteristics are weighed in making an admission decision varies from college to college, but broad generalizations can be drawn about their use at public versus private institutions. Private colleges tend to interpret a student's test scores and diversity characteristics subjectively, and in combination with other information. In contrast, public colleges tend to rely on objective formulas that draw heavily on a student's high school achievement and test scores as a way to make either an initial cut in the applicant pool or a final admission decision. In these colleges, student diversity characteristics may be omitted entirely from the selection process, or enter only after students have passed an initial screening.

Box 2

College Admission Tests

The most common tests taken by college applicants are the SAT-I (formerly known as the Scholastic Assessment Test) and the ACT (formerly known as the American College Test). These are standardized tests, meaning that they are generally taken under uniform conditions.

The SAT-I (also referred to as the Reasoning Tests) is a primarily multiple-choice test of verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities. It is administered by the College Board and is taken annually by about 41 percent of all high school seniors (about 1.1 million students). Test takers receive separate verbal and math scores that range from a low of 200 to a high of 800. Usually, the two scores are combined to produce an overall score, with a minimum of 400 and a maximum of 1600.

The ACT is a multiple-choice test of four areas – English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. It is designed to draw on the content knowledge test takers have acquired in high school and to assess how well they can use and apply it. It is administered by the ACT Program and is taken annually by about 36 percent of high school seniors (almost 1 million students). A score ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 36 is given for each area tested. A composite score, also between 1 and 36, is computed as the average of a test taker's scores in the four areas.

Around 90 percent of four-year public and private institutions require applicants to submit either SAT-I or ACT scores.[7] The two tests are used interchangeably by most institutions, and scores on one are often converted into their "equivalent" on the other. In addition, some students take both tests and/or take the same test several times, submitting only their best score.[8] These test scores are often the second most important piece of information (after high school achievement) in making admission decisions.[9]

In addition to SAT-I or ACT scores, students applying to selective colleges may submit scores on tests such as the SAT-II, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate. Even if these tests are not required, students may need to take and submit scores on at least one to enhance their chance of being admitted. Administered by the College Board, the SAT-II tests (also known as the Subject Tests) are a group of mostly multiple-choice tests that measure a test taker's knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge in areas such as English, history, mathematics, science, and languages. Scores on each test range from 200 to 800. The Advanced Placement exams, also administered by the College Board, are curriculum-based tests in a variety of subject areas including calculus, chemistry, economics, English, and US history. The results are reported on a 5-point scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Scores between 3 and 5 qualify a student to receive college credit or advanced placement. Exams taken for the International Baccalaureate Diploma are rigorous end-of-high-school tests offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization and taken by students around the world. The diploma is recognized by most universities internationally and can earn students college credit and advanced placement. Students generally take exams in six subject areas, and marks awarded range from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 7.

The organizations that develop these tests host websites that provide information to students, parents, teachers, and college admissions staff on how to prepare for and take the tests and how to interpret and use the scores. For more information on the SAT-I, SAT-II, and Advanced Placement exams, go to http://www.collegeboard.org. For more information on the ACT, go to http://www.act.org. For more information on the International Baccalaureate, go to http://www.ibo.org/

Testing and Diversity in Conflict in the Admission Process

The first major challenge to the use of a student's race or ethnicity in making college admission decisions came in 1996. In what has become known as the Hopwood decision, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a student's race could not be used as an explicit factor in decisions on admission or awards by public institutions of higher education in Texas, Alabama, and Louisiana. This was followed by the repeal of affirmative action in admissions to public higher education in California (Proposition 209), Washington (Initiative 200), and more recently, Florida (One Florida Initiative).

Policymakers, educators, and school administrators in these states were left with the challenge of maintaining, if not increasing, racial diversity on college campuses without being able to use a student's race as a factor in admissions. Race-blind admission was seen as an impediment to campus racial diversity – particularly at very selective colleges, because of the large gaps in test scores and GPAs between non-minority and under-represented minority students (see Box 1).

...Some project that participation by black and Hispanic students in college will further decline in proportion to their populations between 1995 and 2015.

Box 3

Diversity and College Admissions

In educational settings, diversity is generally taken to mean differences in student talents, national and geographic origin, race, ethnicity, gender, lifestyle choice, and so on. However, in conversations about college admissions, the word often becomes synonymous with race or ethnicity. While race is currently seen as a way to give a wider array of students access to college, historically it was used to deny access to certain groups of students. Race emerged as a positive factor in college admissions only in the 1960s and 1970s through the affirmative action policies that many colleges instituted in an effort to identify, recruit, admit, and assist large numbers of minority students.[10] For many people, the legitimization of this use occurred only in the 1978 Supreme Court decision in California Board of Regents v. Bakke (438 U.S. 265, 1978), where the justices held that race could be considered in the admission process, but only as one of many pieces of information and if it was not used to create a separate admission process for different racial groups. This ruling became a guideline for how colleges used race in making admission decisions and was not seriously contested until the rollback of affirmative action in California, Florida, Texas, and Washington.

Even at its peak in the late 1970s, these affirmative action efforts at racial equity fell far short of reflecting the nation's overall population and its population of high school graduates.[11] Black and Hispanic students still tend to be under-represented on selective college campuses. In addition, there has always been a large gap in college graduation rates for different racial groups, with black and Hispanic students lagging behind their white and Asian-American counterparts. This picture does not seem likely to change in the near future. In fact, some project that participation by black and Hispanic students in college will further decline in proportion to their populations between 1995 and 2015.[12]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The most direct response to the potential negative effect of test scores on the racial diversity of the admitted student population was the introduction of so-called percent rules in California, Florida, and Texas. Under these rules, a certain percentage of graduating seniors in the state's public high schools was automatically granted admission or eligibility – based primarily on their class rank - to one of that state's public universities.[13]

Opinion is divided as to the appropriateness of race-blind admissions and the effectiveness of policy responses such as percent rules in maintaining or increasing racial diversity while at the same time admitting students who will be academically successful. This conversation has not been confined to states that have moved to race-blind admissions. Rather, it has become a national debate over the educational and social goals that underpin college admissions and the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in that process.

The most direct response to the potential negative effect of test scores on the racial diversity of the admitted student population was the introduction of so-called percent rules in California, Florida, and Texas.

Project Overview

In order to understand the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics (primarily race and ethnicity, but also other characteristics) in making an admission decision, National Board researchers interviewed 13 admissions directors and four admissions consultants in the summer and fall of 1999. The total number of interviews involved (17) and their length (3 to 4 hours each) made it possible to explore various testing- and diversity-related admission issues in depth and from varying perspectives.

Four main areas were covered in the interviews (See Appendixes A and B for the full sets of questions):

> **Admission Factors,** *including questions on the organizational context of admissions; the types of information used in making an admission decision; and the link between an institution's mission and the way it makes admission decisions;*
>
> **Recruitment and Marketing,** *including questions on marketing and recruitment goals and strategies; the use of financial aid and merit awards to attract students; and the influence of college rankings on admission decisions;*
>
> **Diversity,** *including questions on definitions of diversity and the link between an institution's diversity goals and the way it makes admission decisions;*
>
> **Affirmative Action,** *including questions on the institution's stance on this issue and the effects of recent court rulings on admission decisions.*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

While a wealth of information was obtained on admissions directors' and consultants' views and knowledge in each of these areas, this report focuses specifically on what they said about the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in admission decisions.

The admissions consultants interviewed had between 6 and 22 years of consulting experience with a variety of selective public and private colleges across the US. In addition, they had worked between 12 and 15 years in various college admissions offices and had first-hand experience with the difficult decisions that admissions staff face daily. The admissions directors interviewed came from a cross-section of selective public and private four-year institutions and had between 18 and 30 years of experience with college admissions. The interviewees were thus able to give us a broad and in-depth picture of the way in which colleges make their admission decisions and to point out some of the tensions involved.

Selectivity levels for institutions were defined in terms of test score, high school rank, and high school GPA ranges for enrolled freshmen students, as well as acceptance rates (see Table 1). Non-selective colleges (those that accept 86 percent or more of all qualified applicants) were excluded.

Table 1. Selectivity Levels*

Level of Institutional Selectivity	Average High School Rank of Students Admitted	Average High School Grades of Students Admitted	Median SAT I** and ACT Test Scores of Students Admitted	Percent of Students Admitted
Most Selective	Top 10 to 20%	B+ to A	**SAT-I:** 1300 and above **ACT:** 29 and above	Less than 33%
Highly Selective	Top 20 to 35%	B to B+	**SAT-I:** 1240 to 1300 **ACT:** 27 or 28	Between 33 and 50%
Very Selective	Top 35 to 50%	No less than B- average	**SAT-I:** 1140 to 1240 **ACT:** 24 to 26	Between 50 and 75%
Selective	Top 50 to 65%	C to B-	**SAT-I:** 1000 to 1140 **ACT:** 21 to 23	Between 75 and 85%

Table 2 describes the institutions at which the admissions directors we interviewed worked. No information that would identify individual institutions is given. However, it is noticeable that the public schools tend to be large and urban while the private schools tend to be smaller and suburban. In addition, the public institutions cover all four levels of selectivity listed in Table 1 while the private institutions are spread only across the top three. Since all of the admissions directors and consultants we interviewed worked at, or consulted with, selective to most selective institutions, their insights are restricted to this type of institution. How admissions take place at non-selective institutions is not addressed here.

The biggest contrast we found was in the way admissions works at public versus private institutions.

Table 2. Profile of the Institutions

Public Schools	Selective (S)	Very S	Highly S	Most S	Region
Small town co-ed university offering degrees up to the master's level, undergraduate enrollment over 10,000	✔				West
Small town co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment under 5,000			✔		South
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment over 20,000	✔				South East
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment over 20,000				✔	West
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment over 15,000		✔			East
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment over 20,000		✔			North West
Private Schools	**Selective (S)**	**Very S**	**Highly S**	**Most S**	**Region**
Suburban co-ed university offering bachelors degree only, enrollment under 2 000			✔		North East
Suburban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment under 10,000				✔	North East
Suburban co-ed university offering degrees up to the masters level, undergraduate enrollment under 2,000		✔			East
Suburban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment under 5,000				✔	South
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment under 5,000				✔	North
Urban co-ed university offering degrees up to the doctoral level, undergraduate enrollment under 5,000		✔			West
Suburban co-ed university offering bachelors degree only, undergraduate enrollment under 2,000				✔	West

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

While Table 2 shows that we managed to achieve some variation in selectivity among the institutions chosen, we did not find large differences in the way the admission process worked at these different selectivity levels (within the public and the private domains). It may be that as soon as a college achieves some level of selectivity, student test scores and diversity characteristics begin to play certain roles, and these roles do not change markedly as selectivity further increases. The biggest contrast we found was in the way admissions works at public versus private institutions. Thus, most of the distinctions we make in this monograph are between public and private ways of handling admissions.

Our findings are discussed in the chapters that follow. Since confidentiality was promised to all interviewees, we use only the general titles of admissions director and admissions consultant. For the directors, we further identify the institution where they work in terms of selectivity level and whether public or private. While we do not always use quotations, all of what we discuss is based on what we were told in those interviews.

The overarching theme in the interviews was the variety of ways in which institutions use student test score and diversity information.

The overarching theme in the interviews was ***the variety of ways in which institutions use student test score and diversity information- from tools for marketing and recruitment to information for admissions decision making to foci for academic and support services on campus. This is done to accommodate the many academic and social goals of institutions for the types of students they hope to attract, enroll, and graduate***. While the rest of this report addresses this in more depth (dividing the admissions timeline into "before," "during," and "after" stages), three related points raised in the interviews are worth mentioning here. First, ***many of the admissions directors and admissions consultants interviewed emphasized the "balancing act" in an admission decision***. This occurs at several levels: there is a balancing of the various pieces of information about an applicant; there is the balancing of the individual applicant with the desired talent composition of the incoming class; and there is a balancing of educational concerns with financial realities – a student's ability to pay. Yet another sort of balancing occurs in attempts to meet both quality and access goals. For example, an admissions director at a selective public institution remarked that they were "trying to recruit a freshman class that is reflective of the demographics of the state," but that this had to be achieved while keeping a "balance of quality" - test score and GPA ranges for the incoming class – "and access [for under-represented minority students]."

Second, ***interviewers noted that issues of supply and demand can shape a school's admission process significantly***. For some schools, an oversupply of applicants can mean that diversity goals are compromised as the academic standards for admission (e.g., test scores) are raised. An admissions director at a selective public institution noted that access for under-represented minority students always diminishes when there are more people than places. For others, an oversupply of applicants can be a chance to pursue diversity goals. Thus, an admissions director at a very selective private institution described the recent increase in his applicant pool as a chance "to do some selecting and varying demographics" as well as "to improve the academic profile" (i.e., test scores) of the incoming class.

Third, ***the admissions directors we interviewed differed from each other not only in terms of the selectivity level and location of their institutions, but also in terms of their institutions' educational and social goals.*** This also applied to the client institutions of the consultants we interviewed. For that reason, it is difficult to make firm comparisons across interviews or to draw broad conclusions. This is reflected in the recommendations we present in Chapter Four.

Report Overview

Issues surrounding the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in college admissions will not go away. In fact, they are likely to become even more pressing as a student population ever more diverse academically and racially moves through the education pipeline toward college. The graduating high school class of 2008 is expected to be the largest and most diverse in history – something many of our interviewees commented on. What opportunities await them? What goals should we have for them individually and as a group? These are important issues and ones that we address in the chapters that follow.

Issues surrounding the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in college admissions will not go away.

Chapter One has provided some background on the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in college admissions as well as an introduction to the work of the National Board in this area. Chapter Two looks at the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in college admissions from the viewpoint of admissions directors at selective public and private institutions and from that of admissions consultants. Chapter Three explores some of the options that colleges have in their use and interpretation of test score and diversity information when making an admission decision. Chapter Four presents some general recommendations on how colleges might begin to think about the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in their admission process. The voice of the interviewees comes through most strongly in Chapter Two as we draw heavily on the admissions directors' and admissions consultants' knowledge of college admissions to describe the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics before, during, and after the decision is made to accept or reject a student. Chapters Three and Four contain fewer quotations but use the opinions and views of these interviewees to explore systematically some options for using test score and diversity information.

CHAPTER TWO
The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions

This chapter draws heavily on our in-depth interviews with admissions directors and consultants to give an overview of the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play at different stages of the college admission process (see Box 4 for the way our interviewees defined diversity). Also presented are existing or proposed strategies that interviewees identified for balancing the effect of these roles on the composition of the student body. The discussion is organized into the time periods before, during, and after the decision is made to accept or reject a student. "Before" refers to the period from when colleges start to recruit students (and students start to inquire about colleges) until a student decides whether and where to apply. "During" covers the period in which a college reviews the information a student has submitted and decides whether to accept or reject him or her. "After" covers the activities that colleges engage in after the admission decision, such as the granting of financial aid to encourage students to enroll and the use of support programs to keep them in college. To help the reader better understand how the process might play out and the tensions and decisions involved, we provide vignettes of four fictional applicants applying to two fictional colleges, which illustrate how students with differing test scores and diversity characteristics might fare in different admission processes (see Boxes 5, 10, and 13 below).

Box 4

Definitions of Diversity

In the interviews we conducted, diversity was variously defined as encompassing:

- race/ethnicity
- gender
- sexual orientation
- socio-economic standing
- religion
- geography
- leadership
- academic discipline
- non-academic talent, including musical, artistic, and athletic ability
- legacy status
- age
- students' disabilities

Despite this long list of student characteristics, diversity in practice was more narrowly defined. For example, an admissions director who worked at a most selective public institution told us that

> diversity tends to be a code word for under-represented [minority] students, and [while] there are some attempts to make it more inclusive in terms of gender and geographic and socio-economic status diversity…the race and ethnicity definition is most common.

This narrower definition appeared to be dictated by institutional marketing and recruitment goals, which tended to focus on race, ethnicity, and gender.

Some admissions directors and consultants avoided using the term "diversity," preferring instead to use words like "pluralism," "inclusion," or "a welcoming environment." The main reason given for this was that "diversity" was "an overused term with too much connotative baggage." An admissions director at a selective public institution explained that she

> [uses] the terms "heterogeneity" and "multiculturalism" and anything else that avoids the "D" word. Diversity has been overused and is value laden. It raises people's hackles on both sides of the divide.

As a case in point, when this admissions director wanted to hire an assistant who would be primarily responsible for minority recruitment, she deliberately wrote the job description without using the word "diversity."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 3 shows the roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play at various stages of the admission process, according to our interviewees. It is noticeable that the two pieces of information play almost parallel roles (with a few pointed differences) at each stage of the process. For example, student test score and diversity information is used in marketing and trying to recruit students. Perhaps it is because of this overlap in roles that they "hit up against each other" so much. Strategies for balancing the impact of these roles on the academic and racial composition of the applicant, admitted, enrolled, and retained student body, as identified by our interviewees, are also provided in table 3. Below, we look more closely at each stage of the admission process and the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in those stages.

Table 3. The Roles of Test Scores and Diversity Characteristics in College Admissions

	Test Scores	Diversity Characteristics	Balancing Strategies
Before	• Focus for Marketing and Recruitment • Signaling Device	• Focus for Marketing and Recruitment	• Improving the academic preparation of students in the K-12 pipeline • Encouraging students to apply to college
During	• Information for Decision-Making	• Information for Decision-Making	• Basing the admission decision on several kinds of information • Using a student's race, or proxies for a student's race, as a factor in admission decisions • Linking a college's mission to the way it makes its admission decisions • Using a percent rule
After	• Factor in Financial Aid Decisions • Factor in Selecting Students for Academic Support Programs	• Factor in Financial Aid Decisions • A Focus for Retention Efforts	• Providing academic support for admitted students who might have difficulties with college-level work • Providing non-academic support for students • Finding different ways to measure success in college

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Before a Student Applies

Students interested in applying to college soon discover that there is no shortage of information. Websites and guidebooks abound, in addition to advice from high school counselors, teachers, parents, and peers. There are around 2,240 public and private institutions to choose from. Generally, students' choices are constrained by finances, interest, academic ability, prior achievement, and so on, resulting in a final set of perhaps three or four colleges that they will apply to in the hope of being admitted to at least one.

...admissions directors told us that they often find themselves in a campaign with multiple purposes as they try to recruit students from different categories that match the various academic and social goals of the institution.

Meanwhile, colleges are going through a parallel process of trying to market their institution and to recruit students who will succeed.[14] The word "campaign" that is often used for marketing and recruitment efforts is appropriate here as schools engage in an all-out effort to promote their institution and to distribute user-friendly information to those who might otherwise not consider applying. Indeed, admissions directors told us that they often find themselves in a campaign with multiple purposes as they try to recruit students from different categories that match the various academic and social goals of the institution. The task is labor-intensive. An admissions director at a selective private institution explained that "while maybe 50 percent of the inquiry pool comes to us on their own, the remainder has to be created or generated by the staff."

It was interesting to hear about the changes that have taken place in the way schools market and recruit and the reasons for them. An admissions director at a selective public institution explained that the size and demographics of the college-age population have changed a lot over the years. While colleges expanded in the 1960s to accommodate the baby boomer generation, they had to scramble for applicants in the years that followed, leading to a shift "from processing [applications] to marketing and service." Because of the smaller pool of potential applicants, an admissions director at a very selective public institution explained that "everything is getting earlier" as schools struggle to engage students' interest and to identify promising candidates earlier and earlier in the game.

The task is not an easy one, partly due to the type of student involved. An admissions director at a very selective private institution noted that the students being targeted are

> *the MTV generation. They are used to getting many images flashed at them. They won't sit down and read an extensive presentation and you have to respond to this.*

The response seems to take the form of websites, videos, on-line presentations, downloadable application forms, and virtual campus tours. An admissions director at a most selective private institution explained that "the web, which was a small thing as recently as five years ago, is now a major way of recruiting – especially international students." A consultant remarked that "the Internet is changing everything. There are virtual interviews and virtual tours; e-mail to alumns and faculty; face-to-face web-based interviews."

Those we interviewed spoke of developing differentiated marketing and recruitment approaches for "the high-ability student population, students of color, legacy students, students with a certain academic interest, students from certain areas." Some of the things that colleges do to recruit students include:

- sending mailings to individual students
- conducting outreach to high schools in the immediate area or state
- using the College Board Search Program (described below)
- participating in College Nights at high schools
- hosting web sites that give information on the college and the application process
- disseminating general publications on the school that increase public awareness
- disseminating specialized publications that target specific types of students
- building partnerships with high schools
- extending campus-visit invitations to individual students and schools

Student test score information and diversity characteristics help focus many of these recruitment efforts as well as the broader marketing efforts. One particularly popular recruitment strategy that used test scores and, to a lesser extent, diversity characteristics was the College Board Search Program. All of the admissions directors we spoke to used this program, which allows them to request the names of students scoring above a certain point on the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (the PSAT is a practice test for the SAT-I that gives students a chance to qualify for scholarship and recognition programs) and above a certain high school GPA. Schools then write to these students, including information on the institution and any scholarships or awards students may be eligible for. For example, an admissions director at a selective public institution explained how brochures describing his institution's scholarships tied to test scores and GPA were used to encourage high-achieving students to apply:

> *There is a brochure on scholarships. Students with a combined score of 1050 or above on the PSAT and a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher receive 25 percent off in-state tuition.*

An admissions director at a most selective private institution echoed this, saying that "financial incentives play a critical role in the recruitment of students with high test scores and GPAs."

Student test score information and diversity characteristics help focus may of those recruitment effects as well as the broader marketing efforts.

The use of this test score-GPA combination in recruiting was not seen as problematic, although colleges recognized that students with high test scores and GPAs were receiving special attention and encouragement early on that their lower-achieving peers were not. In particular, since under-represented minority students have lower average PSAT scores (as well SAT-I and ACT scores) and lower high school GPAs, they are at a disadvantage if schools request names based on test score and GPA only. However, most schools we spoke to also requested information broken down by race so that they could target and recruit higher-achieving minority students (usually blacks and Hispanics). In fact, several colleges saw this recruitment strategy as key to their efforts to maintain a racially diverse campus in what an admissions director at a most selective private institution called "the litigious environment that has followed the rollback of affirmative action policies."

While the College Board Search Program helps many colleges to target and recruit students who are high-achieving and also minority, colleges often also have minority-specific recruitment programs.

While the College Board Search Program helps many colleges to target and recruit students who are high-achieving and also minority, colleges often also have minority-specific recruitment programs. An admissions director at a selective private institution described its strategy as follows:

> *The recruitment officer [in charge of minority recruitment] basically develops a specific component of the marketing plan, all the way from the Student Search to the high schools that she'll visit, the guidance counselors to bring on campus, [and] the involvement of alumni, and will make sure that all the on-campus programming has a segment for students from diverse backgrounds.*

While most of the admissions directors we interviewed emphasized minority recruitment as a way to help achieve diversity on campus, the consultants noted another emerging trend – a trend toward recruiting more men to correct a growing gender imbalance. One admissions consultant referred to men as "the new category" and noted that gender diversity issues "may be more controversial [than racial diversity issues] as the number of females in college is increasing and the ratio is tipping in their favor."

The issue of the social values and goals underpinning college admissions came through most forcefully when admissions directors and consultants spoke of the role of diversity in recruitment. According to several admissions directors at both public and private institutions, a diverse campus environment (racially, ethnically, and otherwise) has social policy value in that it brings together students who can educate each other, contribute to the common good, and train together for leadership roles in society. One admissions director also spoke of the "social costs of screening out large numbers of [diverse] students."

In addition to their roles as recruitment foci, test scores and diversity characteristics played a role in marketing the institution more generally. For example, diversity information was used in college guides and brochures to describe the composition of the student population. According to some admissions directors we interviewed, the marketing value of diversity was tied closely to its value as a recruitment tool. For example, an admissions director at a selective private institution explained that it was necessary to do minority recruitment because there is

> *the desire for class composition that will best reflect the institution to the public. In other words, is there an element of diversity there that would make the public say – yes, that's appropriate. I'd consider sending my child there.*

Test scores could have a similar marketing function in the form of the institutional average or range for the previous year's freshman class. Published test scores were seen as a way to showcase the academic standing of the institution. In the words of one admissions director at a selective private institution:

> *The public does an immediate correlation between test scores and prestige [and assumes that] the higher the test scores, the better the institution.*

The link between test scores and prestige created the most pressure (but also the most marketing potential) for schools when presented in the form of institutional rankings. The impact of media rankings, such as those published by US News and World Report,[15] on colleges was described as "an explosion" by one admissions director at a most selective public institution. While all were unanimous in their dislike of the rankings, they also realized that the public uses them to identify "quality" schools. In the words of one admissions director who worked at a most selective private institution:

> *Research studies with accepted students tell us that out in the marketplace the ratings have little impact; anecdotally we hear differently. Because families understand so little about evaluating college, here, they say, is something that has done that for me.*

An admissions director at a selective private institution noted that rankings

> *can adversely affect an admissions program because they insulate a student...from going to the step of collecting and measuring their own impression of an institution. A Tier Three ranking may prevent [a student] from even knocking on the door.*

According to several admissions directors and consultants, the marketing function of the institutional test score average or range can put pressure on the way test scores are used in making admission decisions. In particular, several admissions directors at private colleges said that they used "early decision" or "early action" programs as a way to increase their yield of high-achieving students, who would raise the institutional average. These programs allow high-achieving students to apply in the fall semester of their senior year and receive an admission decision by about January of the following year. Colleges with early decision programs require students admitted in this fashion to decide early whether they want to attend that college (earlier than students admitted through the regular program). Such students are bound to accept that college's offer (i.e., they cannot turn the college down to attend another college.) Colleges with early action programs also admit students early, but do not require an early decision; students decide at the same time as those admitted through the regular process.

According to several admissions directors and consultants, the marketing function of the institutional test score average or range can put pressure on the way test scores are used in making admission decisions.

Students applying to and being admitted through these programs can constitute a sizeable portion of both the applicant and admitted student pools. For example, an admissions director at a most selective private institution explained that early action students constituted 18 percent of his institution's applicants, while an admissions director at a selective private institution explained that his early action pool, "which represented about 20 percent of the total pool, yielded at a much higher rate than the regular applicant pool" (thereby helping to boost the institutional average).

The flip-side of this approach to admissions was that students with low test scores, who might be able to succeed if admitted, were sometimes rejected because they would bring down the institutional average. Students initially placed on wait lists and later admitted (who tend to have lower than average test scores) or students admitted through summer programs may also be excluded from the institutional average or range as a way to improve the school's test profile.

Admissions directors described how students sometimes used an institution's test score average or range to "gauge their probability of admission."

Closely linked to this marketing function was the signal that institutional test score information sent to individual students. Admissions directors described how students sometimes used an institution's test score average or range to "gauge their probability of admission." This was seen as troubling since the published test score information was not always an accurate indication of a student's probability of admission. This was especially true in the case of private schools that may want to increase some aspect of student diversity on campus and therefore weigh test score information for the target group differently (public schools generally do not have this latitude). An admissions director at a highly selective private college explained that

> *kids looking at the mean SAT scores may be getting an inaccurate picture. For them the question is, what do you need to get in if you're not in certain groups.*

Another admissions director at a most selective public institution echoed this by saying that an institution's test score average or range was

> *misleading to students with high test scores and GPAs who think they should get in and don't, and to students with low scores who think they shouldn't apply because they probably won't get in.*

In order to reduce this signaling effect, admissions directors spoke of the need to present test score information in context and to use diverse recruitment strategies to reach out to qualified students who might not consider applying based on their test scores.

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity

The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed spoke of two sets of strategies for balancing the academic quality and diversity (usually defined as race and ethnicity) of the applicant pool.

The first group of strategies – ***which focus on the academic preparation of students in the K-12 pipeline*** - includes collaborative efforts by colleges and K-12 educators to increase the rigor of the pre-college curriculum, particularly for minority and low-income students who tend not to take many college-track courses. These efforts sometimes incorporate outreach programs in which college professors and students visit neighboring schools to help with curriculum development, teaching, or one-on-one tutoring and mentoring. Several admissions directors also described on-campus programs (so-called summer-access programs) run by their institutions where high school students spent the summer taking courses and improving their academic and test-taking skills. An admissions director at a very selective private institution explained that these programs were difficult to do properly due to lack of resources, and that therefore colleges might be reaching students too late: "Some students, you see them for the first time in their senior year and this is the first time they have thought about [preparing for] college."

The second group of strategies – ***which focus on encouraging students to apply to college, particularly those from homes with no tradition of third-level education*** – includes mentoring and counseling given to students in high school as well as a college's own efforts at outreach and recruitment. Outreach to high schools in a variety of neighborhoods, and recruitment focusing on individual students, were seen as ways to balance the desire to attract highly qualified students with the need to attract minority students. The downside for many interviewees was the fact that these efforts are costly, and that it takes years to build relationships with high schools and to bring the number of minority students to the desired level. An admissions director at a most selective private institution noted that: "The problem with these programs is that they are very high maintenance. You can only do a few of them and you have to constantly maintain them."

Many admissions directors used one or both of these two sets of strategies to good effect. However, it was difficult to gauge their general effectiveness as they were implemented differently across institutions and small numbers of students were involved. Below is an illustration of the "Before" stage in the college admission process, and of the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in that process, using four fictitious applicants and two fictitious colleges.

Box 5

Four Students and Two Colleges – An Illustration of the College Admission Process

The Students

Laura is an 18-year-old Asian-American student. Her grandparents came to the US from China about 40 years ago. Laura scored 800 in mathematics and 600 in verbal on her SAT-I. Her high school GPA is 3.6 (out of a possible 4.0) and she has taken many of the college-track courses on offer. She scored 3 (out of a maximum 5) on an Advanced Placement history test. She took one SAT-II test in US history, scoring 650. Laura comes from a high-income family. Her parents want her to go to the college they both attended.

Maria is an 18-year-old Hispanic student. She scored 650 in mathematics and 450 in verbal on her SAT-I. She has a high school GPA of 3.8 (out of a possible 4.0), but avoided taking Advanced Placement or other advanced college-track courses as she is not confident about her English skills. She also took no SAT-II tests. Her parents emigrated to the US from Mexico 12 years ago and mainly Spanish is spoken at home. No one in her family has gone to college. Maria wants to go to college but is not sure whether her family can afford it.

Mike is a 17-year-old white student. He excelled on his SAT-I with scores of 750 in mathematics and 750 in verbal. He also took three SAT-II tests (English, history, and math, scoring 700, 650, and 720 respectively) and an Advanced Placement test in calculus (scoring 4 out of a maximum 5 points on the latter). His high school GPA is 4.0 (out of a possible 4.0). Mike comes from a low-income family. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother. His mother dropped out of college 25 years ago and never went back. His father never went to college.

Rob is a 17-year-old black student. He scored 700 in mathematics and 400 in verbal on his SAT-I. His high school GPA is 3.5 (out of a possible 4.0) and he is especially strong in mathematics. His school does not offer Advanced Placement courses, but Rob has taken all available advanced mathematics courses. He also took an SAT-II math test and scored 600. Rob comes from a middle-income family. Both of his parents have college degrees.

The Colleges

Breland University is a most selective public institution that annually admits around 3,000 students. About 30 percent of the applicants are admitted. The combined SAT-I score range (25th to 75th percentile) for entering students is 1200-1430; the high school GPA range (25th to 75th percentile) is 3.2 to 3.9 (out of a possible 4.0). Breland does some outreach with neighboring high schools and is particularly interested in encouraging under-represented minority students to apply.

Cooper College is a highly selective private institution that annually admits around 1,000 students. About 40 percent of the applicants are admitted. The combined SAT-I score range (25th to 75th percentile) for entering students is 1150 to 1340; the high school GPA range (25th to 75th percentile) is 3.0 to 3.6 (out of a possible 4.0).

The "Before" Stage

Laura, Maria, Mike, and Rob want to apply to Breland University as it is one of the best public universities in their state. Maria and Laura are also interested in Cooper College as it has a strong reputation.

Breland University and Cooper College both use the College Board Search Program to find students that they can encourage to apply. Breland requests names of students with scores at or above 1300 on the combined SAT-I and with GPAs at or above 3.5. It also requests names of black and Hispanic students with scores at or above 1200 on the combined SAT-I and GPAs of 3.0 and above. Cooper College requests names of students with scores at or above 1200 on the combined SAT-I and with GPAs at or above 3.5, and of black and Hispanic students with scores at or above 1050 on the combined SAT-I and GPAs of 3.0 and above. Using this process, Breland University identifies Laura and Mike as students to recruit; Cooper College identifies Laura, Maria, Mike, and Rob. Both colleges write to these students, including information on their campuses and any scholarships or other awards they may be eligible for.

After receiving information on Cooper College, Mike decides that he will apply there in addition to Breland University. Laura had already decided to apply to both colleges, so receiving letters from both of them does not change her plans. While Maria and Rob do not receive a letter from Breland University, they write requesting information on its programs and admission requirements. They also search the Internet. Maria notices that the combined SAT-I score range (25th to 75th percentile) for first-year students is 1200-1430. With a combined SAT-I score of 1100, Maria is unsure as to her chances of admission. She decides to apply only to Cooper College. Rob also notices that his combined SAT-I score is lower than the published range for students attending Breland. Nonetheless, he applies.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

During the Application Review

Once a school receives a student's application, the information must be reviewed and a decision made whether to accept or reject the student. In particular, the school needs to decide whether the student is qualified to do the academic work and has other characteristics that will help the institution fulfill its stated mission.

Admissions directors at private institutions described a process in which applicants had to apply by a certain deadline (there were different deadlines for early decision or early action applicants versus regular applicants). Admissions directors at public institutions sometimes described a similar application process and sometimes a process of "rolling admissions," whereby students could apply at any time and the college would decide immediately whether to accept or reject them in accordance with set guidelines. Most of the admissions directors at both types of institution that we interviewed said that students applied to and were admitted to the university, and not to a particular school (e.g., education) or major (e.g., elementary education). Even where students were admitted to a school or major, the same admission process (with some variation in subject requirements and transcript review) generally applied. For example, an admissions director at a selective private institution explained that "there may be one admission process, but we review candidates slightly differently depending on what their proposed academic interests are. This affects transcript review."

While the admissions directors at public and private colleges described very different admission processes, they held some common views on the extent to which test scores and diversity characteristics were useful in admission decisions. One commonly held viewpoint regarding test scores was that they were a uniform, albeit imperfect, way of comparing students "from diverse...schools with non-uniform grading policies." As the admissions director at one highly selective private college explained:

> *Test scores are the only standard measurements by which we can gauge students [because] there are flaws in class rank and GPA [in that] we can't measure the quality of the [sending] school.*

An admissions director at a selective public institution explained the usefulness of test score information in her admission process as follows:

> *[There has been a] proliferation of home schooling and charter schools. Both have the option to use non-traditional grading methods. Some use pass/no pass, in which case the admissions office at [this school] has to convert everything to a C. The schools got smart and took to making everything an A. You get transcripts from these schools that are all A's and you don't know anything about the curriculum. That would be a case where [I] would put more weight on the test since it's the only standardized measure we would have.*

An admissions director at a very selective private institution commented on test score use as follows:

> *The test scores alert us to students who may need extra support. That's how we use lower-end test scores. Transcript and GPA can help, but sometimes you see students coming from certain public high schools with 3.8 GPAs and a 700 [combined score on the SAT-I]. It raises the suspicion of grade inflation. You get to recognize the high schools, but you don't tell anyone this.*

While the admissions directors at public and private colleges described very different admission processes, they held some common views on the extent to which test scores and diversity characteristics were useful in admission decisions.

As well as grade inflation, essay fraud (where an applicant presents as his or her own an essay written wholly or largely by others) was a concern and a reason for using test scores. This was the case mainly in private institutions, although essays are becoming a more common application requirement for public institutions as an alternative to affirmative action. (This is because essays give institutions a chance to learn more about an applicant beyond their GPA and test scores).

Another commonly held viewpoint that somewhat reduced their usefulness as a standardized measure was that test scores alone were not a good predictor of a student's ability to do well in college, particularly in the case of minority students, and no one interviewed had a test score cut-off point or prediction equation.[16] One admissions director at a very selective private college echoed the sentiments of several interviewees when he stated that often students were admitted "more in spite of...than because of test scores." Another admissions director at a selective public institution emphasized the need to look beyond test scores because

> *there are so many variables on the test-taking thing. Students from high SES environments do better on the test because they take [Advanced Placement] courses and do test prep. That's without the test being culture-bound. [I] think that most people realize this....GPA is also sensitive to SES level, but that seems to be more acceptable to people than for test scores.*

The most commonly held viewpoint regarding diversity characteristics (when defined as race and ethnicity) was the need to balance the academic quality of the admitted student body with access for different student populations.

Admissions directors at public and private institutions on the lower end of the selectivity range also spoke of students with 700 and 800 totals (out of a possible 1600) on their SAT-Is who were able to succeed at their institution, given the right support. These students would have been rejected if evaluated on their test score alone.

The most commonly held viewpoint regarding diversity characteristics (when defined as race and ethnicity) was the need to balance the academic quality of the admitted student body with access for different student populations. The consultants we interviewed presented a broad view of how this issue was regarded across public and private institutions as well as how attitudes towards diversity had changed. One consultant explained:

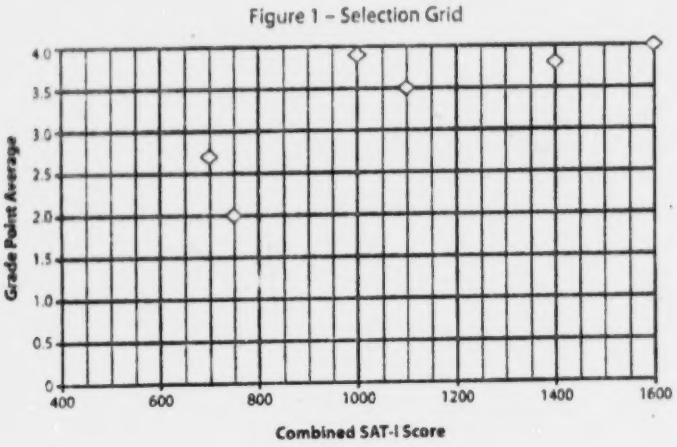
> *In the 1970s and 1980s there was a lot of idealism. Access was an important element and there was pride in providing opportunities for students through identifying or targeting them as an important recruitment group. Special attention was given to them by protecting them in admissions and giving them financial aid packages.*

However, the consultant went on to state that legal and fiscal concerns, plus pressure to increase the academic quality (i.e., test scores) of the students admitted, have made it more difficult for colleges to pursue these goals and that "social goals are still present, but no longer as a first priority." Not every interviewee agreed with this statement. Another consultant made the more generally accepted observation that while access and associated diversity goals may not be the first priority,

> *most schools want that ethnic mix, but not because of affirmative action considerations. Its because they genuinely want the mix due to demographic trends that are now emerging. Growth in population size will be biggest among the minority groups. [The schools] need to prepare for the future and future markets.*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Admissions directors at public and private institutions differed in the way they interpreted and weighted test score information and diversity characteristics when making an actual admission decision (see Boxes 6 and 7 for examples of the ways our interviewees described the overall admission process at public and private colleges). For example, regarding test score use, we were told that at public institutions the most common approach was to interpret test scores objectively (i.e., higher test scores are better) and to use them in combination with a student's GPA or class rank to make an initial cut in the applicant pool. A student's test score and GPA information was placed on a grid and students with high test scores and GPAs were admitted right away, those with low test scores and GPAs were rejected, and those in the middle were given further review.



For example, in Figure 1, the applicant with a combined SAT-I score of 1600 and a GPA of 4 and the applicant with a combined SAT-I score of 1400 and a GPA of 3.8 would be admitted immediately. The applicant with the combined SAT-I score of 700 and a 2.7 GPA and the applicant with a combined SAT-I score of 750 and a 2.0 GPA would most likely be rejected (if the institution was selective), and the remaining applicants with a combined SAT-I score of 1100 and a 3.5 GPA and a combined SAT-I score of 1000 and a 3.9 GPA would likely undergo further review.

This review process generally involves looking at other information (such as the courses students took in high school or the essays they wrote) before making an admission decision. Depending on the information students are asked to submit, diversity characteristics such race, ethnicity, gender, athletic ability, musical ability, and so on might become part of the decision-making process at this stage (this will be discussed more below). The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed described this stage of the admission process as a "balancing act" as admissions staff tried to balance decisions about individual students with the overall talent composition of the admitted class.

One point that admissions directors at public institutions made again and again was that ***a student's high school GPA always wins out over test score in making these admission decisions***. In fact, all of the admissions directors at public institutions that we spoke to said that a student with a high GPA and low test score would generally be admitted before a

The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed described this stage of the admission process as a "balancing act" as admissions staff tried to balance decisions about individual students with the overall talent composition of the admitted class.

student with the reverse, all else being equal. This is because the former was seen as a poor test taker who tries hard, while the latter was seen as one who may have the brains but doesn't try hard; and schools "don't want to deal with" this type of student. As an admissions director who worked at a highly selective public university remarked:

> *If we see a 4.0 and terrible test scores, there is something wrong. If we see good test scores and a poor GPA, we just drop the student. This student is obviously not disciplined enough to do class work and we don't want to bring that trouble to [our university]. When they have the 4.0 and low test scores, we look hard at the rest of the information. We try to find a reason why the student didn't test better.*

...the general approach was to interpret test scores and GPA in combination, and in the case of a discrepancy to place more emphasis on the GPA (if backed up by a strong transcript).

In fact, another admissions director who worked at a selective public institution noted that because GPA was such a good predictor of academic success, "a student who had a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher was not required to send a test score." This is at odds with comments made by other interviewees who described test scores as the only standardized means available for comparing students from different high schools. However, the general approach was to interpret test scores and GPA in combination, and in the case of a discrepancy to place more emphasis on the GPA (if backed up by a strong transcript).

Another point made by admissions directors who worked at public colleges was that they had much larger applicant pools, but proportionately fewer admissions staff, than many private colleges. Using a student's test score and GPA information to make a first cut in this large applicant pool was one of the few legally defensible ways to make the process more manageable. However, an admissions director at a very selective public institution noted:

> *There's no way to fairly and equitably allow a computer to make these decisions because the variability at the high school level is so enormous. You [still] need experienced professionals making these decisions. You need to reconcile nuances.*

Admissions directors at private colleges described a different approach to the use and interpretation of test scores. At private colleges, each student application or file (including test scores, high school transcript, high school GPA, letters of recommendation, essays, etc.) was generally read in its entirety by one or more of the admissions staff. Each person who read the file assigned a score to the student (e.g., from 1 to 10, with 1 being the best) based on his or her subjective evaluation of all of the information in the file. A student's test score and GPA (or rank in class) might be used to give a student an initial score (e.g., an SAT-I total of 1300 and a 3.8 GPA might earn a student an initial rating of 3), and then other information was used to adjust that score up or down (e.g., if the student had no extra-curricular activities and mediocre letters of recommendation the rating might drop to a 5). While the readers were generally given broad guidelines on rating a student's file, they also used their own judgment. Since each file was usually read by more than one person, each student received several scores. If there were discrepancies, a senior reader reviewed the file and assigned a final score. After all files were reviewed, the admissions staff conferred and made their final decisions. While this review process is quite subjective, it was viewed by the admissions directors at private colleges that we interviewed as the best way they had to predict whether a student would be successful in college.

Box 6

The Admission Process: Public Institutions

An admissions director at a selective public institution described the process as follows.

We create the application. We request transcripts. We evaluate records. We create a rank list using a formula based on SAT-I [combined verbal and math scores] and GPA. Given this process, anyone with at least 1050 [combined score on the SAT-I] and a 3.0 [out of a possible 4.0 GPA] is accepted. All the others are held.

An admissions director at a very selective public institution described the process as follows:

Guidelines are pretty much academic guidelines – that is, they are curriculum-based. [There are] specific curriculum requirements [that] differ by each school or unit. In addition, rank in class is considered, [and] standardized test scores. Students can also submit an essay – a response to a question they've been posed or a writing sample. All is considered as part of their admission file....[We] don't assign numbers to students based on the submitted information. What we do is presort. A student who is absolutely admissible based on quantifiable characteristics like rank in class and standardized test scores goes to the main admissions committee. Their function is to affirm a positive admission decision. [A student in] the top 10 percent in high school and [with] 1300 on the SAT-I is a good bet here. We check for mistakes in the information at this stage. The second category of students is the one we're not so sure about. These students go to a review committee and their job is to look through and synthesize everything in the student's file to make the best possible decision. The third group of students are those who don't look admissible based on test scores etc. We check for mistakes here too....Every file is reviewed by a committee. Test scores are one of many factors....[and] not a determining factor. There's a grid. A student with low test scores could still get in if they were around the top 10 percent of their high school. [They] would go to the main committee. In some cases, [we] may ask a student for a second set of scores or call [his or her] guidance counselor. A student in the bottom ranks [in high school] but with 1400 SAT-I scores would be considered inadmissible.

An admissions director at a most selective public institution described the process as follows.

[We] do a layered approach to the review process. We do an academic review for every student that applies. This means that we look at their academic records, rank them, and on that basis select the top students. Our mandate...is that we have to select at least 50 percent and up to 75 percent [of applicants] on academics alone. The remainder has to be a combination of academics and some other criteria like low income or first generation college bound or coping with adversity....[These] remaining students [undergo] a more comprehensive review. We go into every course, every grade, what they did outside the classroom in terms of intellectual pursuits and personal achievements and what they did with life challenges they had to cope with. We rerank all of those students on these new indicators. So, they have a comprehensive academic ranking, a personal achievement ranking, and a score for life challenges overcome. On the basis of the original academic rank and all these other scores, we select the remaining class.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Box 7

The Admission Process: Private Institutions

An admissions director at a selective private institution described the process as follows.

The process used is like a descriptive profile. The reader needs to use subjective judgment and weigh up the data on the student in all the different areas and see whether the student is an A, B, C, and so on [where A is the best rating and E is the worst rating] based on the extent to which they match up to the profile of an A, B, etc. student....This process is more important when a student is not an outright admit and they need to go to committee. You need to exercise a lot of judgment here. Have the student's grades been gradually improving, disimproving, remaining constant? Are there extreme circumstances? Every file gets two readings. If the file is not an automatic admit, then it goes to committee review. Then, more people than two have a chance to review the file. If someone is very weak, they are still run through a committee. They may then be out or put in a holding pile until we see how the offers of admission are coming back in.

An admissions director at a very selective private institution described the process as follows.

[Students must submit] a transcript, a letter of recommendation, results of tests. We don't require SAT-IIs. The application form collects basic demographic information about the student and about the courses they have in progress. Parental information is collected to see if the student is a legacy or a first generation college student. There's a question about the language spoken at home. Twenty-five percent of the students indicate that English is not the main language spoken at home. That helps with evaluating test scores. There is also an autobiographical essay....Every application is read by an admissions counselor. There are some basic guidelines in terms of what is an admissible student to the university. We sit down every year in the fall and make that determination for the coming year. In reading an application, if a counselor determines that a student is admissible, they may admit the student. If the student is not admissible, for whatever reason, no counselor can reject a student. That file is referred to a committee of at least two other admissions people, so at least three people will look at the file. In looking at the transcript, [we] first [look at] the strength of the program. We recalculate the GPA, using core academic courses only. For a really strong student, unless the letter of recommendation raises a red flag, it doesn't have much influence. For a questionable student, it can make a real difference. Test scores are usually the last things used in the evaluation process....After having looked at everything else, you would expect them to score within a certain range on the test. If they come within the range, fine. If they are above or below the range, that does raise a red flag.

Another admissions director at a most selective private institution explained the process as follows.

[We] read in groups of 100 [applications] and have forced distributions. The files are pulled randomly from the larger pile of all applications. The readers are expected to force a distribution of rating scores from 1 to 10, with 1 the best and 10 the worst. We turn these in to a senior reader who makes sure there is general agreement on these. This is what you do in a lot of high-volume places rather than have a committee that makes a decision on every folder. If there is this distribution of 1 to 10 and 1s are the top 5 percent and 2s are the next 10 percent, and so on, you get a kind of bell curve. The largest group is in the 4, 5, and 6 area. Depending on the percent you want admitted, you make your cut at different places....A factor that determines how far down you go is your yield.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

There was a large difference in the extent to which public and private colleges used student diversity information in making admission decisions. According to the admissions directors at public institutions we interviewed, student diversity characteristics played no role in initial application review where selection/rejection decisions were generally made on the basis of a student's GPA and test score. Depending on the public institution, they might or might not play a role in subsequent reviews. In general, a student's race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and musical or other talents were the characteristics looked at in these subsequent reviews. Public institutions were generally limited in their use of diversity characteristics due to legal constraints imposed on the kind of information that could be considered in admission decisions.

The restrictions on public institutions' use of diversity information in admission decisions were most evident in states that had experienced the rollback of affirmative action. An admissions director at a most selective public institution in one such state described the impact that race-blind admission had had upon the university's admission process. She noted that the process now incorporated proxies for a student's race in an attempt to maintain some racial and ethnic diversity in the admitted student class while at the same time being legally defensible. For example, students applying to the institution were evaluated in terms of their persistence and ability to meet and overcome life challenges, as it was felt that under-represented minority students would score high in this area. The same admissions director explained that the commonly held belief that a race-blind system would produce an academically stronger, albeit smaller, minority student body did not hold true at her institution. In fact, the opposite appeared to be the case:

> *If you look at the reality of the class admitted prior to the elimination of affirmative action and the class admitted [afterwards], and you look specifically at under-represented [minority] students, something very different happens. The academic indicators, the GPA and test scores, instead of getting better, get worse, and there are fewer of these students. There is a significant drop in the academic quality of the under-represented [minority] students....It's the middle-income, under-represented [minority] student that is pushed out because you can't give [them] a little boost [in the life challenges category]....[Lower-income under-represented minority students who tended to score worse than their middle-income peers still got in as they got an extra boost in the life challenges ranking].*

The restrictions on public institutions' use of diversity information in admission decisions were most evident in states that had experienced the rollback of affirmative action.

Other public institutions were also struggling with incorporating race into the admission decision-making process. An admissions director at a very selective public institution explained that her office was "walking a line between race and avoiding lawsuits." Another admissions director at a selective public institution stated the case more strongly:

> *I am not a flaming radical, but if we have a law that prohibits affirmative action or limits it, we will find a way to do it anyhow. We want to make a difference with education. If students can [take university degree courses], and have decent test scores, we will find a way.*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

At private colleges, which are not legally required to implement race-blind admission systems, student diversity characteristics were often used, along with test score information, as part of the rating process. For example, at one selective private institution, we were told that

> *we don't read specifically with categories [such as race, ethnicity, gender, and legacy] in mind. The files are read together and they come out with the best of the best. But these categories, including ability to pay, become balancing points or the extra edge. When you're down to filling the last few places, then you start breaking things down and looking at minority composition and so on. You try to project how this will work out. You're shaping the class.*

Depending on the institution's goals and the composition of the applicant pool, race and ethnicity might be given more or less weight in the application review process.

Depending on the institution's goals and the composition of the applicant pool, race and ethnicity might be given more or less weight in the application review process. For example, an admissions director at a very selective private institution explained:

> *Given what the applicant pool is like, race is actually less of a factor when we make the admission decision than one might suspect. It's not much of a struggle as there's so much diversity in the pool to begin with. We don't cut the pool or count groups.*

On the other hand, an admissions director who worked at a most selective private school felt that he had to struggle hard to admit minorities due to their small numbers in the applicant pool and because "for African-American and Hispanic students, there are fewer 1s, 2s, and 3s [on the rating scale]." For him, race and ethnicity were characteristics that needed to be focused on in order to ensure some racial and ethnic diversity in the admitted student population. An admissions director at a selective private college explained that he would "combine two categories and say that black or African-American males [are] very much at a premium" for his institution and thus an important focus in admission decisions. Boxes 8 and 9 summarize some of the views of admissions directors at public and private institutions about the role of race-based affirmative action in the admission process.

Box 8

Attitudes toward Affirmative Action: Public Institutions

If you had to locate this university along the continuum of attitudes that universities are taking towards affirmative action – from race being considered as an important factor in the admission process to race not being considered as a factor in the process – where would you position it?

An admissions director at a selective public institution:

Race is not a factor in admissions and that's a function of the university being part of the [public] system....As far as admissions goes, affirmative action is a non-issue. It also depends how you define affirmative action because its definition can be controversial. I subscribe to the fact that affirmative action is the proactive recruitment and selection of populations who are otherwise disadvantaged. This can pertain to faculty, to staff recruitment, to students.... So, to me affirmative action is expanding the pool of applicants, its not necessarily preferential treatment....Affirmative action is overblown and misunderstood by many....The early outreach efforts are needed. You need to get qualified students into the pipeline. Until that is under way, [the rollback of affirmative action] should not have been put in place. [This rollback] was premature. The underpinnings should have been in place first.

An admissions director at a very selective public institution:

[This university] is probably on the high side of the continuum where race is a factor. The university has a long-standing historical commitment to the African-American community. If anything, this commitment has strengthened over time. But I need to qualify that by saying that...we are learning to walk a line between supporting race and avoiding lawsuits. We are making a valiant attempt to do the right thing. I feel that the notion that we recruit targeted students – of which African Americans are one group – meets the legal test. We could probably defend the fact that all of our support programs are not race-based as we have majority students in all support programs....The Board of Trustees now want higher SAT scores, but we will need to balance this with our need to recruit African-American students. If it does get to the stage where there is a minimum SAT score and...what defines [this university] qualitatively is our SAT scores, then we're in trouble as there aren't that many African-American students who meet those standards, unless there is some effort at the high school level to teach to standardized tests....Through the Diversity Working Group [here] there have been conversations about the effects of [recent anti-affirmative action rulings and legislation]. In some of these cases, we have needed to be educated on the issues involved. This has helped people understand where they are with regard to affirmative action at this institution.

An admissions director at a most selective public institution:

[This university] does not use race at all as it is against the law....The people who are supportive of [affirmative action] are quite distraught about the elimination of it, and if you look at what happened to the [freshman] class, we lost a significant number of under-represented students....It is ironic that people thought that if you eliminated affirmative action the incoming students would be stronger. If you look at the reality of the class admitted prior to the elimination of affirmative action and the class admitted after,...there is a significant drop in the academic quality of the under-represented students (black and Latino) at [this university]...We could be losing some students to the private schools as these are not bound by the law. We could also be losing students to other [public institutions] that are less competitive and that will take them, and to out-of-state schools that are here recruiting like crazy....Nobody in the [public] system...is tracking the effects of [the rollback of affirmative action] and the fact that black and Latino academic quality have gone down as a result....I feel that these effects...will not correct themselves down the road....It will take people a long time to understand the implications....The decision didn't just affect freshmen coming in, but it will also affect professionals because [the] medical schools and [the] business and law schools got a lot of their class from the [public system] graduates and now they'll be admitting fewer under-represented students from these ranks. It will take years for the effects to show and years to fix it.

Box 9

Attitudes toward Affirmative Action: Private Institutions

If you had to locate this university along the continuum of attitudes that universities are taking towards affirmative action – from race being considered as an important factor in the admission process to race not being considered as a factor in the process – where would you position it?

An admissions director at a selective private institution:

I would say that for [this institution] race is an important factor in the admission process....We would be closer to that end than the other end of the continuum. [This is] because of the desire to influence the community, to infuse the student community with people from different backgrounds and knowledge. Race is not a category in the initial reading of applications. But let's say we've been through three-quarters of the review of the candidate pool, and we've sized it up and have a good idea of the admitted student body. We see where we're short and this might suggest that we were not enrolling students of certain races in the numbers we'd like, then we'd go back to those sub-pools and take another look. We'd make the right decision on our behalf as well as on the student's behalf....Our community believes that diversity is an enriching quality and that we should at least be mindful of diversity considerations....[There have been] very limited [conversations at our institution about the role of affirmative action in admissions]. They've taken place at the President's counsel level. Our corporate attorney sits on the counsel and keeps us mindful of these discussions – not only in relation to ethnicity, but in general....One thing we don't do is set up segmented scholarship programs for specific genders or specific races.

An admissions director at a very selective private institution:

This is difficult to respond to. Only because [this university] is committed to diversity, it would clearly be on the side of the universities where race is seen as a factor in admissions. The [university] President made a very strong statement when [the anti-affirmative action legislation] came out that [this university] had always supported affirmative action and would continue to do so. There's no ambiguity [here] about that. [Diversity] covers gender, race, sexual orientation. Given what the applicant pool is like, race is actually less of a factor when we make the admission decision than one might suspect. Its not much of a struggle as there's so much diversity in the pool to begin with. We don't cut the pool or count groups. Yet, there is an institutional commitment to affirmative action....There were several conversations [here about the role of affirmative action in admissions] up to and after [the rollback of affirmative action] – running the full gamut from how can we as an institution capitalize on [this development] to...given the outreach efforts that the publics are starting in the seventh grade, how will [we] get the message to these students that [this university] is an option....The decision was made not to try and capitalize on [the rollback of affirmative action] in terms of targeting students turned away from the [public] system. What we have seen...is that there are increases in the applicant pool anyway. There are students that might have applied to [the public system] in previous years but now are looking at other options.

An admissions director at a most selective private institution:

Where [this university] would want to be is in the middle of the distribution or maybe a little below the middle....This is due to the [recent] decision. We need to be cautious about race....There have been many conversations [at our institution about the role of affirmative action in admission decisions]. There are documents with guidelines available for staff....The conversations are taking place at the [university] President's level and the senior legal counsel and the senior staff and faculty. The President is very concerned about this. He wants [us] to do better at attracting minority students, but also wants us to stay within the law. The president sees education as the pathway to economic success and doesn't want to see racial gaps in...access to this pathway.

While race and ethnicity are most often the focus of discussions about the role of diversity characteristics in making admission decisions, we found that other student characteristics can receive equal, if not more, weight in admission decisions. Two categories of applicants in particular – athletes (at public and private institutions) and children of alumni (at private institutions) - tend to undergo a separate review and to be admitted at a higher rate than other applicants.

Two categories of applicants in particular – athletes (at public and private institutions) and children of alumni (at private institutions) - tend to undergo a separate review and to be admitted at a higher rate than other applicants.

Regarding the admission of athletes, an admissions director at a most selective private institution explained that

> *the athletes fill out a special application. It goes to admissions as a special reading and it's not put in with the others. And it's considered by the athletic department…A subcommittee of faculty read the applications and vote…for the athletes and the final decision is made by the dean. The dean is between the athletic department and the faculty.*

For most public and private institutions if an athlete is NCAA eligible (i.e., met the National Collegiate Athletic Association's minimum GPA and test score requirements) he or she will be admitted. At the upper end of the selectivity scale, higher standards may be required. For example, an admissions director at a most selective public institution described admission requirements for athletes as follows:

> *There's a separate committee that reviews athletes….[We] will not admit a student who doesn't meet the NCAA minimum standards….But typically [we go] above the minimum standards required.*

An athlete who is not NCAA eligible (or does not meet the institution' standards for athlete applicants) may be given further consideration (more so than a non-athlete applicant) before the application is rejected. For example, an admissions director at a selective private institution explained:

> *Athletes that might be on the edge in terms of being admitted might get a bump up due to their athletic ability, contact with their coach, and additional information received.*

This approach was echoed in a comment by an admissions director at a selective public institution:

> *[These students come] through regular admissions although they are tagged as [athletes] because they go to another office. If [they are] not eligible for admission and they are an athlete, then they must come through as a general exception…and must write letter of appeal. The only thing that happens with athletes is that they aren't denied right off the bat. The associate director of admissions calls the coach and informs him and asks if he wants the student to appeal.*

Similarly, in relation to requirements for the children of alumni, an admissions director at a very selective private institution explained that

> *the alumni or legacy applicants are not a separate category, but this is another factor we look at. In the general reading of the application, we note [whether the student is] a legacy and this would become an issue if they were not admissible. It would be a tipping factor. We may call the alumni office to let them know.*

An admissions director at a most selective private institution described the extra weight given to applicants that have alumni or legacy connections as follows.

> *We go further on the scale for these folks. We are seeking in each freshman class to have about 15 percent alumni admits. It hovers at about 12 percent, even if we admit about 65 percent of alumni children and travel the [rating] scale from 1 to 7.*

It was evident from our interviews that athletic ability and legacy status were used as often as race or ethnicity to shape the admitted student pool.

It was evident from our interviews that athletic ability and legacy status were used as often as race or ethnicity to shape the admitted student pool. Interestingly, students that fell into any of these groups tended to have lower test score averages than the regular applicant pool. For example, as an admissions director at a most selective private noted, "minorities tend to score lower. There is also a big test score difference in legacies." However, this was not always the case. For example, according to an admissions director at a selective private institution,

> *recently, athletes' scores were about 20 points lower than the rest of the class [on the combined SAT-I], which is not terribly significant. Similarly, their grade point averages aren't even a tenth of a point lower than the rest of the class.*

Because the test score gap between minority (i.e., black and Hispanic) and non-minority applicants is so sensitive an issue, some of those we interviewed were reluctant to evaluate their admitted students in this fashion. An admissions director at a selective public institution explained:

> *[We] don't know where students of color fall along the test score range. It's such a sensitive area that we probably wouldn't want to know where students of color fall - particularly if it showed that whites score better than blacks.*

To relieve these tensions between test scores and diversity characteristics in the admissions decision-making process required good judgement and a clear sense of educational and social goals involved.

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity

The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed identified four strategies used at this stage of the admission process for balancing the impact of test score and diversity information (usually defined in terms of race and ethnicity) on admission decisions.

The first strategy – ***basing the admission decision on several kinds of information*** – was seen as a key way to balance the impact of test score and diversity information on the composition of the admitted student body. This was because the more information a college has on a student, the less likely that any one item will determine the admission decision or that any one student group will be advantaged or disadvantaged. For example, an admissions

director at a very selective public institution explained the need to use multiple pieces of information on an applicant.

> *By gender, males score better than females [on standardized admission tests]... [However,] out of all male students in the freshman class [at this university], 24 percent are in the top 10 percent of their high school class. Thirty-two percent of females are. Males have average verbal SAT-I scores of 577, females of 566. [The average] math SAT-I [score] for males is 597; 556 for females. This validates for me that the process is a combination of criteria to balance all these things and to get the best possible class.*

What came through in our interviews was that private colleges tended to be better overall at basing their admission decisions on a mix of academic and non-academic information, while public colleges relied more heavily on test scores and GPA, both of which tend to disadvantage black and Hispanic students.

The second strategy for balancing the effects of test scores and diversity characteristics on the composition of the admitted student body was ***the ability to use a student's race, or proxies for a student's race, as a factor in admission decisions***. Admissions directors at private institutions were more likely than those at public institutions to use race as a factor. Those at public institutions were more likely to use proxies for race (such as the life challenges a student had faced) as a way to give a boost to under-represented minority students who might not be admitted based on their test scores. This was often due to legal rulings that restricted or prohibited the use of race. Those we interviewed were aware that the use of a student's race in admission decisions was not popular with some, since it was believed to disadvantage non-minority students. For example, an admissions director at a most selective public institution explained that when affirmative action was part of an institution's admission decision-making process,

> *every white and Asian student who was turned down probably believed it was one of the 250 black students who got in that took their place. The reality is that only a few of those blacks got in on affirmative action.*

The third strategy, which came up as a recommendation in the admissions consultants' interviews, was ***the need to link a college's mission to the way it makes its admission decisions***. Since most college mission statements include social as well as academic goals, the admission process would look at many types of information (including test scores and diversity characteristics) when deciding whether to admit a student. The admissions consultants we interviewed noted, however, that for most colleges the link between their mission and the way they make admission decisions (in particular, the way test scores and diversity characteristics are used) is weak. One admissions consultant explained the reason for this as follows.

> *Admissions are driven more by numbers and exigency. Those [colleges] that are more selective can afford to be more mission-driven. Others fall back on quantitative indices [i.e., test scores and GPA] to establish quality.*

It should be noted that admissions directors did not point out this weakness in their admission procedures, and when asked, all felt that there was some link between their institutional mission and the way admission decisions were made.

The admissions consultants we interviewed noted, however, that for most colleges the link between their mission and the way they make admission decisions...is weak.

The fourth strategy, commonly known as the ***percent rule***, has only recently come into effect at the system level in California, Florida, and Texas. As described in Chapter One, the percent rule automatically admits a certain percentage of the graduating high school class to the state university system. This effectively circumvents the use of test scores in admission decisions, instead using high school rank as an indicator of academic merit and relying on the racial segregation of many high schools to ensure that diversity will be maintained, if not increased, in the state university system.

Both the admissions directors and consultants we interviewed believed that the use of a variety of information produced the most diverse and academically strong student body at

Box 10

Four Students and Two Colleges – A

The "During" Stage

Laura

- 18-year-old Asian-American student
- 800 in mathematics and 600 in verbal on her SAT-I, 3 (out of a maximum 5) on Advanced Placement test in history, 650 on SAT-II US history test
- High school GPA of 3.6 (out of a possible 4.0)
- High-income family, both parents have college degrees

Maria

- 18-year-old Hispanic student
- 650 in mathematics and 450 in verbal on her SAT-I, no Advanced Placement or SAT-II tests
- High school GPA of 3.8 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Spanish is the main language spoken in the home
- Low-income family, parents with no college degrees

Mike

- 17-year-old white student.
- 750 in mathematics and 750 in verbal on his SAT-I, 4 (out of a maximum 5) on Advanced Placement test in calculus, also three SAT-II tests (English, history, and mathematics, scoring 700, 650, and 720 respectively)
- High school GPA of 4.0 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Low-income family, parents with no college degrees

Rob

- 17-year-old black student
- 700 in mathematics and 400 in verbal on his SAT-I, 600 on SAT-II mathematics test, no Advanced Placement tests
- High school GPA of 3.5 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Middle-income family, both parents have college degrees

Laura, Mike, and Rob apply to Breland University and Cooper College. Maria applies to Cooper College. When Breland University admissions staff receive Laura's, Mike's, and Rob's applications, they place their combined SAT-I scores and GPA information on a grid. Mike's score and GPA place him near the top of the grid. Laura's score and GPA place her slightly below Mike, but still near the top of the grid. Rob's score and GPA place him slightly lower. Breland admissions staff received around 20,000 applications, and given that the number of staff available to review applications is limited, they decide to admit automatically all students with combined SAT-I scores of 1400 and above and GPAs of 3.7 and above, to reject automatically students with combined SAT-I scores of 1000 and below and GPAs of 3.0 and below, and to review all other applicants. This means that Mike is automatically admitted and Laura's and Rob's applications go to further review.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

their institutions. Institutions that used proxies for a student's race in admission decisions reported that this was not particularly effective at producing a racially diverse student body (see also the National Board publication by Koretz, Russell, Shin, Horn, and Shasby for a discussion of this issue). In addition, our interviewees reported (and information we obtained from newspaper articles and research reports confirmed) that while the percent rules appear to have helped increase the overall number of under-represented minority students enrolled in the California and Texas state university systems, the number of under-represented minority students enrolled at the more selective institutions in these systems has decreased. Below, the journey of our four fictitious applicants through the college admission process continues.

lustration of the College Admission Process

Breland's admissions staff review Laura's and Rob's high school transcripts, looking carefully at all of the courses they took. Since Breland University admissions staff often get applications from Rob's high school, they know that this school does not offer Advanced Placement courses, so the absence of these from Rob's transcript is not a mark against him. His SAT-II scores also help boost him. However, the large discrepancy between Rob's math and verbal SAT-I scores suggests that he may have problems with writing and other language skills required for success at Breland, which offers few academic support programs. The admissions office decides to reject Rob's application. Laura's combined SAT-I score and GPA are higher than Rob's, and she has taken several Advanced Placement courses. While there is some discrepancy between Laura's math and verbal SAT-I scores, her high school transcript shows that she has consistently done well in her high school English courses. The admissions staff decides to admit Laura.

When Cooper College admissions staff receive Laura's, Maria's, Mike's, and Rob's applications, all of the information – their test scores, high school GPAs and transcripts, an essay and two letters of recommendation each, their extra-curricular activities, and their race and legacy status – is reviewed by at least two people in the admissions office. Each reviewer is given guidelines for evaluation. They are to use the SAT-I or ACT test scores and GPA to give initial ratings on a 1 to 10 scale (with 1 being the best rating) and then use the rest of the information to assign a final rating. Maria and Rob are given fairly low initial ratings (in the 6 to 8 range) by each person who reviews their files. However, because Maria is Hispanic (a group that is under-represented at Cooper) and has excellent letters of recommendation, her final rating improves (in the 5 to 6 range). Because Rob is black and male (both groups that are under-represented at Cooper) and because he has strong leadership skills and letters of recommendation, his final rating improves even more (in the 3 to 4 range). Laura and Mike both start out with strong initial ratings (1 to 2). However, because Mike does not appear to have many extra-curricular activities or non-academic talents, his rating slips slightly (in the 2 to 3 range). Because Laura's parents both attended Cooper and because she wrote an excellent essay and had strong letters of recommendation, her final rating stayed in the 1 to 2 range. The admissions staff next meet to discuss each student's file. Students with an average rating between 1 and 3 are automatically admitted. This means that Laura and Mike are both admitted. Maria's and Rob's files are discussed further. Both are seen as attractive candidates since they would increase the minority presence on campus. While both have weak verbal SAT-I scores, Cooper offers remedial and support programs in this area. However, Maria would need full financial support if she were to attend Cooper, while Rob's family would be able to cover some of his expenses. Since the admissions staff has been told to keep a close eye on the bottom line and the amount of tuition revenue that admitted students will bring to Cooper, they decide to reject Maria's application and to admit Rob.

After a Student is Accepted

Even after a student is accepted by a college, several decisions have to be made – by both the student and the college - before the student actually enrolls. An important decision for the college is how much and what kind of financial package to give to admitted students.[17] An important decision for the student (particularly one who has been accepted by more than one college) is whether the financial package offered by a particular institution is sufficient for his or her needs. The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed all pointed to the role that test scores and diversity characteristics played in these financial decisions, particularly as foci for "preferential packaging" (see Boxes 11 and 12 below).

Preferential packaging was seen by many of the admissions directors as a way to increase their yield (the ratio of students enrolled to students accepted) among high-achieving and/or minority students with demonstrated need who have been accepted by several colleges. In practice, this meant that these students got a better financial package than other types of students with the same financial need. One consultant summed up colleges' perspective on this as, "What does a financial aid dollar buy?" Another consultant noted that

> *increasingly, in almost every type of institution, your desirability to the institution will be taken into account when determining your financial package – particularly the less selectives.*

Since money is a big concern for many students and parents, a good financial package may be the deciding factor in picking one college over another.

Box 11

Test Scores and Diversity Characteristics in Financial Packaging Decisions: Public Institutions

An admissions director at a selective public institution:

We offer good packages to National Merits, achievers, Hispanics....We identify a student with [a combined SAT-I score of] 1050 plus and [a GPA of] 3.0 plus and give them $250 a semester and call them a university scholar. It makes a difference in how they identify themselves.

An admissions director at a very selective public institution:

Some 80 to 85 percent [of financial aid awards] is need-based. We do different packages – more grant, less loan – based on the expected family contribution and whether or not they are athletes, minority, ROTC, music....[Regarding awards tied to test scores], with 1450 SATs from [a good school] and dirt poor, the admissions office will offer $12,000. This is based on admissions, curriculum, performance, and test score. If the student is a minority, then add it all together. Otherwise, negotiation within a formula.

An admissions director at a most selective public institution:

Test scores...have no effect on financial aid. We don't really give merit awards....There are a few merit-based scholarships. There is [one] scholarship which is based on students in the top of the academic ranks, who are coming from disadvantaged high schools....[This] is to encourage students to come. It's worth up to $5,000 to replace need. If the student has no need, which is rare, they get something like $1,000. Otherwise, it's up to $5,000 for each of four years....[Regarding the award of athletic scholarships], more white students than anyone else get these scholarships. If you look at specific sports like basketball, there may be more black students represented, but overall there are more white athletes coming in than any other kind.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Box 12

Test Scores and Diversity Characteristics in Financial Packaging Decisions: Private Institutions

An admissions director at a selective private institution:

We use strategic packaging. Students who fall into certain combinations of SAT and GPA will get different types of award packages – more grant, less aid than regular students. Equal weight is given to the test scores and the GPA. [Grant money] can be given as a combination of need and academic scholarships....There are specific packages given to minority students...similar to those given to the most desirable high-ability students no matter where they fall on the scale. They get more money than the regular student.

An admissions director at a very selective private institution:

Test scores affect the merit scholarships called the university scholar awards. This is the one merit scholarship program. It's the only merit aid. Everything else is need-based aid. In the packaging of need-based aid, test scores have no influence. Academic record does have influence. Race is also a factor. We preferential-package for African-American and Hispanic students. We also don't use academic record to determine awards for these students. It's a goal of the institution to increase the African-American population....Preferential packaging has helped yield in these areas....Minority students are under-represented in the university scholar awards....We offer athletic scholarships for all men's and women's sports. We talk to the coaches to make these decisions. Once the student meets the NCAA [test score and GPA] requirements, they are admitted. Then it's up to the coach. For some sports like basketball, it's automatic full tuition, room, and board. Other than that, the coaches normally have a number of scholarships to divide up or a pool of money. Its up to the coaches' discretion as to how to divide it up.

An admissions director at a most selective private institution:

We operate on the basis of demonstrated need. Ratings would affect that, but the system is needs-driven. For example, for students rated 1 to 4, all of their demonstrated need is met. For students rated 5 to 6, 95 and 90 percent [of their need is met], respectively. We do preferential packaging. For African-American students then, those rated...1 to 7, all of them would get [100 percent of demonstrated need]. ...Hispanic [students with] 1 to 6 ratings [are] fully funded...There is one merit program....The student must request early action. Any early action applicant rated 1 is considered....Even here, testing is not the be-all and end-all. The[SAT-I combined] scores range from 1390 to 1510 with one 1600.

No one interviewed said test scores alone would determine who gets preferential packaging. However, some admissions consultants provided anecdotal accounts of financial aid offices inappropriately using students' test scores alone in such decisions.

No one interviewed said test scores alone would determine who gets preferential packaging. However, some admissions consultants provided anecdotal accounts of financial aid offices inappropriately using students' test scores alone in such decisions. One admissions consultant noted:

> *it's disturbing that a number of institutions use evaluative short-cuts to determine who's at the top and bottom of the pool. In financial aid, they use exclusively SAT scores. This is a total misuse of the test and it's done as an administrative short-cut.*

Since many colleges seek to attract under-represented minority students, several do preferential packaging for admitted minority students with demonstrated need, irrespective of these students' test scores and GPA. According to one admissions director at a selective private college:

> *There are specific packages given to minority students [with demonstrated need]....similar to those given to the most desirable high-ability students no matter where [the minority students] fall on the scale. They get more money than the regular students.*

Schools also have to decide how to spend these dollars most effectively - for example, whether to spend $30,000 on one minority student with the highest rank or in $10,000 to $15,000 allotments across two or three qualified but lower-ranked minority students so as to increase the number of diverse students on campus.

According to admissions directors at public and private institutions, as well as admissions consultants, test scores (and to a very limited extent, diversity characteristics) also played a role in the award of merit scholarships (these are awarded irrespective of whether the student has demonstrated financial need). For example, some admissions directors offered students an automatic guarantee of a scholarship based on their test scores and GPA alone. As an admissions director at a very selective private institution stated,

> *a student who applies for early action and has a great GPA (3.8) and test scores (1300 combined SAT-I scores) is admitted as a university scholar. They receive a 75 percent tuition scholarship for four years.*

Usually, race was not a factor in scholarship awards, mainly due to legal concerns. As an admissions director at a selective public institution stated:

> *The whole scholarship issue is interesting. Often, there used to be an ethnic eligibility component, but now that is no longer the case due to [the rollback of affirmative action]....Any tag of gender or ethnicity for a scholarship is gone. You can use the "historically disadvantaged" tag [as a factor in awarding these scholarships]. Often, you can attract more students of color using this tag. Recruiting high-achieving students of color is hard because they are being recruited so heavily and with so many scholarship opportunities everywhere.*

Several interviewees noted that minority students are generally under-represented among scholarship holders as they tend to have lower test scores and GPAs. The admissions director quoted above noted that

> *minority students are disproportionately represented in the university scholar awards. Sixty percent of the university scholars are not from under-represented groups [even though 60 percent of the overall admitted pool is made up of students from these groups].*

It is worth noting that our conversations about financial packaging only took place with admissions directors at these public and private institutions; those working in the financial aid offices may have a different view of the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in awarding financial aid and scholarships.

Admissions directors and consultants also pointed out that test scores were sometimes used to decide when in the academic year to admit students (in addition to their use in early decision and early action programs, as described earlier) and where to place them. For example, some admissions directors at public institutions said that test scores were used in conjunction with high school transcripts or grades to identify students who might need extra academic help and that these students were then admitted through a summer access program instead of in the fall. This meant that they had extra academic support and a chance to catch up with other students. For one admissions director who worked at a selective public institution, this also meant that test scores for these students were not included in the fall profile for entering freshmen, thus keeping the institutional test score average or range at a certain desired level: "To keep the fall profile 'nice,' we force applications in the summer; that is, we accept some students for summer, not fall."

Student diversity characteristics (in particular, race and ethnicity) also played a role at this stage in helping schools focus their retention efforts. As one admissions consultant put it, "retention is the key" to the success of the entire admission process as well as the realization of the institution's diversity goals. With this in mind, some schools had academic and other support programs aimed specifically at under-represented minority students who tend to drop out more than other students. In addition, several admissions directors interviewed spoke of the need to develop cultural programs and multicultural curricula so that all students felt welcome and became engaged in the college experience. An admissions director at a very selective private institution described this as follows.

> *Diversity at [this school] means creating an environment that is welcoming and [learning] to appreciate cultural and ethnic differences and to educate students to [these] differences. It is realized... through a wide range of academic programs and course offerings and... through a fairly extensive co-curricular program that complements this.*

As one admissions consultant put it, "retention is the key" to the success of the entire admission process as well as the realization of the institution's diversity goals.

Balancing the roles of testing and diversity

The admissions directors and consultants identified three sets of strategies used at this stage of the admission process for balancing the cumulative effects of the use of student test scores and diversity characteristics (usually defined in terms of race and ethnicity) on the composition of a college's enrolled and retained student body.

Box 13

Four Students and Two Colleges – A

The "After" Stage

Laura

- 18-year-old Asian-American student
- 800 in mathematics and 600 in verbal on her SAT-I, 3 (out of a maximum 5 points) on Advanced Placement test in history, 650 on SAT-II US history test
- High school GPA of 3.6 (out of a possible 4.0)
- High-income family, both parents have college degrees

Maria

- 18-year-old Hispanic student
- 650 in mathematics and 450 in verbal on her SAT-I, no Advanced Placement or SAT-II tests
- High school GPA of 3.8 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Spanish is the main language spoken in the home
- Low-income family, parents with no college degrees

Mike

- 17-year-old white student
- 750 in mathematics and 750 in verbal on his SAT-I, 4 (out of a maximum 5 points) on Advanced Placement test in calculus, also three SAT-II tests (English, history, and mathematics, scoring 700, 650, and 720 respectively)
- High school GPA of 4.0 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Low-income family, neither parent has a college degree

Rob

- 17-year-old black student
- 700 in mathematics and 400 in verbal on his SAT-I, 600 on SAT-II mathematics test, no Advanced Placement tests
- High school GPA of 3.5 (out of a possible 4.0)
- Middle-income family, both parents have college degrees

The first set of strategies focus on ***providing academic support for admitted students (both minority and non-minority) who might have difficulties with college-level work***. In some cases, this support took the form of remedial courses and extra tutoring. In others, it meant lengthening the college stay for those who needed more time to cover the material. One admissions director who worked at a very selective private institution explained that his college gave academically weaker students the option of entering a five-year, instead of the standard four-year, degree program. This allowed these students to take fewer courses each semester while still receiving financial help over the course of their five-year program.

ustration of the College Admission Process

After Breland University admissions staff have made their admission decisions, the financial aid office puts together financial packages. These decisions are based mainly on demonstrated need. Some merit scholarships are also awarded to students with the highest test score and GPA combinations. After reviewing Mike's file, the university decides to cover all his need in a variety of ways – grant, work study, and loans. In addition, Mike's test scores and GPA earn him a merit scholarship. This amount is incorporated into his overall financial aid package. Since Laura is from a high-income family, she does not receive financial aid. In addition, while her test scores and GPA are high, they do not qualify her for a merit scholarship.

The financial aid office at Cooper College bases most of its decisions on students' demonstrated need. However, preferential packaging is also an important part of the process as it allows them to target students that they particularly want: those with high ratings and minority students. These students are given better financial aid packages. Since Mike has high ratings, he receives a good financial aid package. While Rob has lower ratings, he is also given a good package since he is a minority student and a male – two groups that Cooper wants to attract. Since Laura is from a high-income family, she does not receive financial aid.

Decision Time

Mike and Laura receive acceptance letters from Breland University and Cooper College. Rob receives an acceptance letter from Cooper and a rejection letter from Breland. Maria receives a rejection letter from Cooper. Since Rob has one acceptance offer, his decision rests on whether his financial package is sufficient for his needs. After thinking things over and talking with his parents, as well as the admissions staff at Cooper, Rob decides to accept Cooper's offer. Mike has been offered good financial packages from both Breland and Cooper. He decides to accept the offer from Breland as this is a more prestigious institution and his best friend is going there. Laura's parents will have to cover her expenses whether she attends Breland or Cooper. She decides to attend Cooper as her parents went there and it has a small campus that appeals to her. Since Maria received no acceptance offers, she decides to attend a local community college. This will allow her to keep improving her English skills and gives her the option of transferring to a four-year college later.

The second set of strategies focus on ***providing non-academic support for students,*** including financial support, peer mentoring or counseling, and the fostering of a diverse environment and curricula so that students from different backgrounds feel welcomed and acknowledged. Admissions directors at both public and private institutions noted the need to provide such financial emotional, social, and cultural support for students, particularly for under-represented minority students, in order to retain them. A diverse campus environment and curriculum were also seen as important in providing a rich and successful academic experience for all students. One admissions director at a selective public institution described the reasons for the success of his institution at attracting and retaining black students:

> *The environment on campus is friendly. There are role models. There are support services.... We are creating an accepting community based on understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of differences.*

Some admissions directors and consultants spoke of the need to identify and collect both short- and long-term information on the many ways... in which students can be successful, both while they are in college and after they graduate.

The third set of strategies involve ***finding different ways to measure success in college***. This was mentioned by some of those we interviewed, but was not being implemented due to difficulties with finding easy-to-measure indicators. Some admissions directors and consultants spoke of the need to identify and collect both short- and long-term information on the many ways (academic, economic, social, etc.) in which students can be successful, both while they are in college and after they graduate. In addition, it was suggested that by defining various kinds of success in college and beyond, the kinds of information that would be useful in making admission decisions could be identified. An admissions director at a most selective public institution discussed the difficulty of identifying and using such information, both to make admission decisions and to describe the admitted student body to prospective applicants.

> *There are other factors that count. We need to get those factors out there as a way to characterize students in the system, but not everything is easily quantified. People want formulas and statistics and easy answers and guarantees. It doesn't work that way. [A test score] average is such a minimal piece of information.*

Those we interviewed could all point to evidence of the effectiveness of academic support programs (in the form of remedial courses, tutoring, mentoring, and a longer college stay) in helping academically weaker students stay in college and succeed. The value of non-academic support programs and of a culturally diverse campus environment was less well documented, but there was a good deal of anecdotal information suggesting the importance of a "critical mass of one's peers" (in the words of an admissions director at a very selective private institution) in encouraging under-represented minority students to stay in college. An admissions director at a selective private institution also explained that faculty role models were important for these students, and that the recruitment of faculty of color was a priority for her institution.

Conclusion

An admissions officer who reviews a student's application is faced with the challenge of using that information to make an admission decision that will benefit both the student and the institution. The complexity of this process came through strongly in our conversations with admissions directors and consultants. What also came through were the variety of roles that test scores and diversity characteristics play in these decisions and how they affect the composition of the admitted student body. The internal and external pressures that can constrain or distort the way test scores and diversity characteristics are used in making admission decisions were also evident. As an admissions director at a selective public institution remarked about the use of test score information:

> *People [in the admissions office] know [a lot] about how to use testing and how it should be used. Some are rendered unable to use what they know because the institutional mandate is simply to raise the SAT scores.*

The admissions directors we interviewed recognized that such pressures need to be recognized and dealt with if the integrity of the admission process is to be maintained. In addition, the admissions consultants we interviewed noted that colleges need to think more deeply about their mission and how their admission process can help fulfill that mission and its associated goals. The next chapter discusses some of the options that colleges have for the way in which they use test score and diversity information in making an admission decision.

An admissions officer who reviews a student's application is faced with the challenge of using that information to make an admission decision that will benefit both the student and the institution.

CHAPTER THREE
Continuous Improvement in the College Admission Process

A constant theme is that a college's mission... should inform the way student test score and diversity information is used in making admission decisions.

Chapters One and Two described how college admission decisions are currently made, and the roles of student test scores and diversity characteristics in those decisions, based closely on interviews with college admissions directors and consultants. This chapter builds on some of the insights and suggestions offered in those conversations by discussing how colleges can continually improve their use of test score and diversity information in making an admission decision.

We first look at four ways of using test score information in making an admission decision, and then four ways of using student diversity information in that decision. We do not look at the different combinations that colleges might use. We lay out some options and emphasize the need for colleges to set goals that will allow them to make informed choices and develop thoughtful combinations. A constant theme is that a college's mission (see Box 14) should inform the way student test score and diversity information is used in making admission decisions.

This theme came through strongly in our interviews with admissions consultants, particularly when they described how they encourage colleges to think about their goals and the type of admission process that would foster these goals. As one consultant noted: "This is where things fall apart. It's the move from philosophy to reality." Another consultant remarked that "most mission statements read the same: just get the highest SATs." This theme also resonates with recommendations made by the National Research Council in its report on the roles of testing in college admissions.[18] The National Research Council recommends that "admissions policies and practices should be derived from and clearly linked to an institution's overarching intellectual and other goals," and that "the use of test scores in the admissions process should serve those institutional goals."[19]

:EST COPY AVAILABLE

Box 14

Institutional Mission

Most colleges sum up their goals in a one- or two-sentence synopsis known as a mission statement. For example, Duke University's (not one of our interviewees) mission statement is:

> **To provide a superior liberal education to undergraduate students, attending not only to their intellectual growth but also to their development as adults committed to high ethical standards and full participation as leaders in their communities.**

Mission statements often cover both social and academic goals. These goals may be described in terms of the kinds of students that the institution wants to attract, the services or experiences it hopes to provide them when they are there, and/or the kind of student they hope to graduate. For example, academic goals might range from enrolling students who will complete the coursework and graduate to enrolling a high percentage of students who will achieve academic distinction and pursue graduate study. Social goals might include meeting the needs of local employers, fostering a commitment to social service, and populating the professions with minority students. Most institutions have multiple goals.

The mission statement is usually elaborated by institutional policy statements or goals. Many colleges also use what is known as a "five-year plan." This is a strategic plan for helping the college attain certain short- or long-term institutional goals that it has set for itself.

While it seems logical that a college's admission process should be aligned with the institutional mission or the associated policy statements or goals, the link between them is often weak and not well articulated to the public.[20] For the most part, the admissions directors we interviewed said that the university mission influenced the admission process at their institution, but in a vague way; for example, an admissions director at a most selective private institution said that "in the subjective aspect of our work [in the admissions office], the mission of the university plays a major role." Academic goals laid out in the institutional five-year plan were more likely to influence the admission process.

It was evident from our interviewees that colleges vary in terms of who has responsibility for framing admission policy. Among the admissions directors at public institutions whom we interviewed, the key figures identified as shaping overall admission policy for the institution varied from "the state university system, the President, the Provost and Vice Provost, and the director of admissions" (selective public) to "a committee of faculty members and a board of admissions" (most selective public). Among the private institutions where we interviewed, the key figures varied from "the President, Academic Policy Committee, and the admissions office" (selective private) to "when things are going swimmingly, the policy discussions go no higher than the Academic Vice President; when things are not going so well, the policy discussions go higher" (most selective private).

Using Student Test Score Information

Four of the ways in which the use of student test score information can vary are the way test scores are related to other information; the way they are interpreted; the way test score information is published or publicized; and the way test scores are related to financial aid decisions.

Relating test scores to other information

From an institutional point of view, collection and processing costs are attached to every piece of information on a student, and therefore every piece of information used must count. Testing information is generally accepted as part of the admission decision-making process (over 90 percent of colleges require applicants to submit SAT-I or ACT scores and all of the admissions directors we interviewed used it in their decision-making). The question to ask that might be, what other information adds to, or complements, test score information? For those who feel that this places test score information too squarely at the center of the admission decision, the question might be, how does a test score add to or complement other information on the student?

In our interviews, we learned that a student's high school GPA and transcript adds considerable information on a student (although some high schools refuse to compute GPA or class rank information). However, we also learned that when there is a discrepancy between test score and GPA, the latter is generally given more weight. This is because, as an admissions director at a very selective public institution explained, "what predicts academic success is previous academic performance, and GPA stands for previous academic performance." And we learned that letters of recommendation from teachers and open conversation with high school counselors complement test score and GPA information and help admissions staff make better matches between applicants and the college or university.

The point is that every institution should carefully consider the kinds of information it uses in making admission decisions and the balance among them.

The point is that every institution should carefully consider the kinds of information it uses in making admission decisions and the balance among them. It is – or should be – accepted practice that testing information should never be used alone in making admission decisions. Admissions staff at some institutions may decide that other types of information are more useful and dispense with test score information altogether or make it optional. (Recently, the president of the University of California system proposed ending the SAT-I requirement for students applying to universities in the system.)[21] While opinions among our interviewees ranged from heavy reliance on test scores because they "reflect innate ability" (an admissions director at a very selective public institution) to a reluctant use of them because they could be "misleading" (an admissions director at a most selective public institution), most of those interviewed valued test score information for its complementary role in admission decisions.

Interpreting test scores

Schools can interpret test scores objectively or subjectively. For the former, the scores are read or interpreted as an independent measure that the school wishes to maximize. The higher the test score, the better. (For example, an admissions director at a selective public institution explained that his admission policy was "driven by the numbers.") Subjectively, the scores are interpreted in light of a student's high school transcript and GPA, the quality of the sending high school, courses taken, and so on. (For example, an admissions director at a selective private institution explained that his admissions staff put test scores in context in terms of "how the student has made use of the resources available to him.") In this case, the school may choose to give less weight to student test scores except insofar as they show academic dedication and record. An admissions director at a selective public institution spoke about educating admissions staff to interpret test scores as follows:

> *They aren't well educated in the realm of testing to enable them to make many interpretive decisions. They are used to using them objectively....[Despite this,] in the case of the exceptions, the test score is considered subjectively. For a regular student, the test score would be objective.*

These choices in test score interpretation may vary from student to student, program to program, and by stage in the admission process. For example, in the early stages of application review, student test scores may be interpreted objectively (in combination with GPA), and students with high scores (and GPAs) may be automatically admitted while those with low test scores (and GPAs) are automatically rejected - the basic admission model at many public institutions. After these initial decisions, test scores for the remaining applicants may be submitted to a subjective interpretation – that is, evaluated in light of students' socio-economic status or the challenges they have faced in life. This two-stage process happened at several of the public institutions where we interviewed. Different programs within a college (e.g., engineering, nursing, arts and sciences) may also require different approaches to interpretation. An engineering program may require objective interpretation of applicants' mathematics scores and allow for a subjective interpretation of their verbal scores. Thus, test performance in one area may be emphasized over another. For example, an admissions director at a very selective public institution explained that

> *required test scores vary across the different schools....The College of Arts and Sciences would be more concerned with the composite test score [on the SAT-I]. The School of Engineering focuses in more on the SAT-I math score. If [applicants] have a low verbal [SAT-I score] and okay academic performance, but a high math score, [they are] likely to be accepted here.*

While resources and other constraints operating on admissions officers will largely determine how objectively or subjectively a school interprets test score information, the guiding principle should be the school's mission or related policy statement.

While resources and other constraints operating on admissions officers will largely determine how objectively or subjectively a school interprets test score information, the guiding principle should be the school's mission or related policy statement.

Publishing/publicizing test score information

Once an institution decides how it will combine testing information with other student information and how it will interpret test scores, it must choose the type and amount of test-related admission information it will publish, publicize, or otherwise disseminate. Some questions that institutions might ask in this area, and that our interviewees asked themselves, include the following.

- Should the institutional score range be published for accepted or enrolled students or both?
- Should an institutional range be published at all? What purpose does it serve when used in rankings such as those produced by US News & World Report?
- Is a minimum test score required for admission, and if so, is it clearly stated and disseminated to applicants? Should there be a minimum test score?
- What information should be supplied to potential applicants on the way in which test scores are used in admission decisions?
- Is information provided on the way test scores are used at various stages of the admission process (e.g., for making an initial cut in the applicant pool) and will this information be the same for all students?

An institution has a wide range of choices about the type and amount of information it will release on student test scores and how they are used in making admission decisions.

An institution has a wide range of choices about the type and amount of information it will release on student test scores and how they are used in making admission decisions. These choices are of great importance, as each type or piece of information gives a different view of the institution and the types of students that it accepts and enrolls. For example, several admissions directors at both public and private institutions pointed out that the institutional test average or range for an institution can deter some students from applying, thinking that their scores are too low for them to be accepted. However, these students forget that the average or range does not reflect the lowest and highest scores; students below the range may still have a good chance of being accepted even if they are not in a target group.

Relating test score information to financial aid decisions

As discussed earlier, test score information can be used in a variety of ways in determining how much financial aid to give to students. One procedure was described by several admissions directors at private colleges.

> *Students who fall into certain combinations of SAT and GPA will get different types of award packages – more grant, less aid than regular students. Equal weight is given to the test scores and the GPA....[We also] offer an automatic guarantee for scholarship levels based on SAT and GPA...[These are] four year-renewable scholarships.*

While this use of test scores may help maximize the test scores of entering students, the impact on the diversity (racial or otherwise) of the admitted student body, as well as the diversity profile of those receiving awards and other types of scholarship, needs to be kept in mind. Schools can choose the extent to which they provide information on the numbers of students receiving financial aid, merit awards, and other scholarships, the use of test scores in these decisions (e.g., alone or in combination with other information), and the context (need-based/merit-based) for these decisions.

Using Student Diversity Information

Four of the ways in which student diversity information can be considered are in terms of type of diversification (e.g., race, geography, legacy status); level of diversification (i.e., at the classroom, school, college, or system level); the value added by diversity; and the fit of diversity with the organizational structure.

Types of diversification

In Chapter Two, we listed some aspects of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, geography, sexual orientation, non-academic talents, legacy status). These dimensions can be used to create a diversity profile that will vary from institution to institution and can be used to gauge progress toward various institutional diversity goals. In its simplest form, the diversity profile would present the percentages of students at an institution by race/ethnicity, SES, gender, geography, special talents, lifestyles, and so on. This profile might look like the following for Institutions A and B.

Institution A

Race	SES	Gender
• 5% African American • 1% Native American • 10% Hispanic • 84% White/Other	• 10% High SES • 70% Medium SES • 20% Low SES	• 35% Male • 65% Female

Institution B

Race	SES	Geography
• 35% African American • 20% Hispanic • 45% White/Other	• 5% High SES • 40% Medium SES • 55% Low SES	• 70% East and North East • 10% West and Mid West • 10% South • 10% International

Institution A has focused on race, SES, and gender. While other types of diversity may be present, these three are perceived as most important to the institution's goals and mission. Institution B has also focused in on race and SES. However, instead of gender, it has included geography as another type of diversification, reflecting an institutional goal.

To determine where an institution might want to go with diversity, it could use the profile to look at areas of diversification in terms of attained diversity, attainable diversity, and ideal levels of diversification. So, for example, if Institution B is located in a major metropolitan area, it might find it fairly easy to attain racial and ethnic diversity, but rather more difficult to attain diversity in SES or geography. Institution A might find it easier to attain gender diversity than racial diversity. Throughout, a college must keep its mission and institutional policy in mind when creating its diversity profile and the associated goals and choosing what information is to be disseminated about the current and proposed school profiles. An admissions director at a selective private institution noted the trade-offs that must be made when setting diversity goals as well as goals in other areas, and then trying to use the admission process to achieve them.

> *You need to remind [those who help shape admission policy] that there are competing benchmarks here. If they want higher test scores, they might end up with fewer minority students or fewer athletes. You can't have everything. Some things are going to cost you. You might need to tell the president or the academic policy committee what the costs are going to be and ask them to prioritize what they really want. Or you may need to lower your sights a bit in certain areas to achieve more across the board.*

As has been noted, private institutions have more leeway in deciding on their diversity priorities and goals and using the admission process as a way to realize them.

Levels of diversification

Student diversity is present at several levels: the educational system; the institution; a school within the institution; and the classroom. All things considered, it is more difficult to diversify as one travels from the educational system as a whole to individual classrooms. Some degree of student diversity at certain institutions in an education system (say, public universities in California) can be said to result in some diversification of the system. Similarly, the presence of some number of certain groups of students at an institution may be said to result in some diversification of that institution. On the other hand, as one approaches schools of management, engineering, nursing, and the like, one may find that the institution's "diversity" is not evenly distributed across the schools, or if it is, the numbers of students involved are quite small. For individual classrooms, the achievement of diversity is yet more difficult. An admissions director at a most selective public institution in a system that had experienced the rollback of affirmative action noted that while the number of under-represented minority students in the system overall might have remained stable, they had decreased dramatically at her institution, which was "losing students to [other schools in the system] that are less competitive and will take them." Thus, while the system was diversified, diversity at her institution had decreased.

A policy choice for institutions, therefore, is the level – i.e., institution, school, classroom – at which diversity will be sought. Of course, this decision must also be tied into the mission of the college or university and the policy statements that flow from it.

A policy choice for institutions, therefore, is the level – i.e., institution, school, classroom – at which diversity will be sought.

Diversity and value added

In addition to the concern that many people have about college access for diverse student groups, there is also a need to be concerned about the benefits or the value added - academic, social, economic, and cultural - by diversity to the education of all students, the overall quality of an institution, and, ultimately, the social justice quotient of society.

In considering this issue, it is useful to distinguish between diversity-related inputs (e.g., the diversity characteristics of students entering the institution) and diversity-related outputs (e.g., the social growth and cultural knowledge that the presence of diverse groups of students adds to the education of all students). As diversity-related inputs, the school can report (as it chooses) on the number of students with various diversity characteristics, the number of dollars spent on recruiting, and the budget implications of financial aid packages targeting these groups. If admissions-related diversity is viewed in terms of an output – the educational value added by diversity – then the college can talk about the quality of undergraduate education at the level of the institution (as an inclusive environment that develops students' abilities to function in a multicultural society), the school (as a learning experience enhanced by a diverse student body), and the classroom (through changes in curriculum and instruction). A college or university can emphasize diversity-related inputs or diversity-related outputs or both, depending on its educational mission and its admission goals.

The way an institution structures itself can help or hinder its diversification efforts.

Diversity and organizational structure

The way an institution structures itself can help or hinder its diversification efforts. Below are some questions that institutions can ask themselves - and that our interviewees had varying answers for - in assessing how their structure is helping or hindering their diversification efforts.

- Is responsibility for diversifying the student body given to one person in the admissions office or spread across all admissions staff?
- Is responsibility for diversifying the student body concentrated in the admissions office or spread across several offices (e.g., general administration, finance, academic study, human resources)?
- Is there an institutional commitment to diversity? How broad or narrowly focused is it? Is it an official or unofficial commitment?
- What is the level of financial commitment to diversity before, during, and after the official admissions period?
- Is a diverse faculty a goal?

Many options are available to an institution for the way in which it uses test score and diversity information in making an admission decision. An institution's admission policy can be viewed as the way in which it combines and uses this and other information about a student. In the end, how the institution's mission informs this admission policy will determine in a significant way what students are admitted.

CHAPTER FOUR
Recommendations

The admissions directors and consultants we interviewed possessed much wisdom and a lot of good sense. Our purpose in this monograph has been to give voice to these professionals in the hope that the interested public will learn from them. The recommendations we offer, few in number, are based on these interviews.

The overall recommendation of this report is that institutions freely discuss, internally and externally, how they make their admission decisions and how student test score and diversity information figure in those decisions. For example, about the role of internal deliberation on admission policy, an admissions director at a selective public institution explained:

> *[Admissions-related] policy-making should be a partnership decision as it's hard for the admissions office to take a policy and implement it if the policy makers aren't familiar with some basic operational tenets.*

Opening up the admission process to this type of deliberation could help remove some of the mystery that currently surrounds the way admission decisions are made and the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in that process. In such discussions, we would hope that the relationship between a college's mission and the way it makes admission decisions would be explored and that policy statements on that relationship would be formulated so as to make clear how students' test scores and diversity characteristics are used.

In this light, we urge colleges and universities that do not already have one to establish a permanent trustee committee on admissions that would regularly review, among other things, institutional definitions of and plans for diversity as well as policy on the use of student test score and diversity information in making admission decisions. This recommendation is in direct response to what we heard in the interviews – in particular, the fact that admissions, while key to implementing a university or college mission, was often off the screen of the trustees and most of the faculty.

Additionally, it might be useful to complement the trustee committee on admissions with an institution-wide committee that acts as an advisory board, composed of faculty and representatives of key administrative functions like provost and finance. The idea is not to overwhelm admissions staff with attention and advice but to allow them to choose from their many options for organizing and conducting admissions in a way that compliments the institutional mission and goals.

The overall recommendation of this report is that institutions freely discuss, internally and externally, how they make their admission decisions and how student test score and diversity information figure in those decisions.

A fine outcome ...would be a close consideration of all that the admissions directors and consultants told us, followed by internal and external deliberation of a process – the admission process – that admits to society the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and doers.

The rest of our recommendations follow directly from the discussion in Chapters Two and Three. They are framed as several admissions-related questions:

- What information is actually used in making an admission decision, and what information would suffice for, or better serve, institutional goals?
  - Under this general question, those involved in admission policy-making should ask more specific questions about the value of student test score and diversity information in making an admission decision, and whether other information should be collected in addition, or instead, to inform the decision.
- At what stage(s) in the admission process should test score and diversity information be used?
  - Under this general question, those involved in the policy and practice of admissions should ask more specific questions about whether and how test score and diversity information should be used to target students for recruitment, market the institution, make a first or final cut in the applicant pool, and help focus financial aid decisions.
- How much descriptive and statistical information can the institution provide that the interested public would like to have on the process, context, and outcome of admission decisions?
  - Under this general question, those involved in formulating and implementing institutional policy should ask more specific questions about the types of student test score and diversity information that should be made public and the messages this information may send to students, parents, and others.
- What does the diversity profile of the institution look like, and how do admission policy, institutional policy, and institutional mission relate to current and future profiles?
  - Under this general question, those formulating and implementing institutional policy should also ask more specific questions about the level of diversification the institution will seek and over what time period, and the extent to which it regards diversity as value added to education.
- Given the options available for supporting testing- and diversity-related admission activity, what will determine final choices and how will those choices reflect the preferences of the interested public?
- What type of data should be collected in order to track the extent to which the admission process fulfills the institutional mission and goals?

We believe that these recommendations give form and amplitude to the voices we heard and the issues they raised. A fine outcome from where we sit would be a close consideration of all that the admissions directors and admissions consultants told us, followed by internal and external deliberation of a process – the admission process – that admits to society the next generations of leaders, thinkers, and doers. How educational institutions balance and pursue their joint academic and social goals is a matter of the greatest importance now and for all time.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMISSIONS DIRECTORS

OVERVIEW

A. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

I. Thanks for Participation and Assurance of Confidentiality

II. Overall Interview Structure and Logistics

B. ADMISSION FACTORS

I. Overview of the Admission Process

II. Special Categories of Admits

III. Initial Screening Factors

IV. The Role of Test Scores in Making Admission Decisions

C. RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING

I. Marketing

II. Recruitment

III. The Effects of External College Rankings

D. DIVERSITY

I. Operating Definition of Diversity

II. The Role of Admissions in Achieving Diversity Goals

III. Diversity Goals and Recruitment

E. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

I. Position on Affirmative Action in Higher Education

II. The Effects of Social Policy Trends on Admission Practices in the Past Few Years

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I. Thanks for Participation

II. Courtesy Review and Copy of Final Report Offers

A. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

I. **Thanks for Participation and Assurance of Confidentiality**

II. **Overall Interview Structure and Logistics**

B. ADMISSION FACTORS

I. **Overview of the Admission Process**

Question 1: To start, I'd like to learn about your background in the area of admissions. How did you get started in this area?

Prompt: What changes have you seen over the years?

Question 2: Let's focus on the admission process itself as it occurs at this university. To give me a sense of how your office works, I'd like you to create a map of the admission process at this university. Maybe we could start at the point where a student enters your applicant pool and continue until the point at which you have formed a freshman class.

Focus: How are wait lists developed?

Focus: How are students rated? Is there a clearly defined rating system? Where do tests fit into the process?

Focus: Who are the key figures involved in shaping overall admission policy?

Focus: To what extent does university mission influence this policy?

Focus: Are students admitted to the university or to a particular school or program within the university? If the latter, are there any differences in the way admission decisions are made for each school?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

II. Special Categories of Admits

Question 1: Up to now, I have asked you to give me a general overview of the admission process. I'd now like you to talk about the different admission categories you use – e.g. legacy, athletes and any others you may use to categorize applicants.

Focus: Which categories are at a premium? Who are you targeting in particular?

Focus: Do you incorporate these categories into your rating system?

Question 2: Could you describe the extent to which minority students are represented in each of those categories?

Question 3: I have heard that some institutions may use a different admission process for students in certain admission categories (e.g. older students or students with learning disabilities). Is this the case at your institution?

Focus: How do you deal with the test score information you obtain on these students?

Focus: Are their test scores used in computing the institutional average? Who decides how this will be handled?

III. Initial Screening Factors

Question 1: I'd like to return to the initial stages of the admission process – in particular the methods you use to first sort through your applicant pool. What factors do you use as screening devices at this early stage of the admission process?

Focus: Do you use the same screening process for all students or does it differ for certain groups or categories of students?

Focus: Is there a test score cut-off point at which you usually won't consider an applicant for admission? Does this differ for particular groups of students?

IV. The Role of Test Scores in Making Admission Decisions

I'd like once again to focus on a particular aspect of the admission process – in this case the interpretation and use of test scores in making admission and financial aid decisions.

Question 1: In reviewing applications, to what extent do test scores tell you whether a student is capable of doing advanced work at your institution?

Focus: What other factors might you use to make this decision about a student?

Focus: Do you have a prediction equation that combines some of these factors? Could you tell me about some of the factors and weights that go into this equation?

Question 2: In general, to what extent do you rely on test scores when you are evaluating a student's GPA?

Question 3: Most institutions have an SAT-I or ACT test score range or average that they provide as information to prospective applicants and which tends to remain relatively stable from year to year. Is there an overall institutional average or range that you aim for on a yearly basis?

Focus: Do you keep a handle on how well you are achieving this range throughout the admission process or do you take a reading at the end of the process?

Focus: How are different groups of students distributed across this test score range - i.e., do certain groups or categories of students tend to clump at the upper, middle or lower points of the distribution?

Question 4: Finally, I'd like to discuss the extent to which test scores may influence financial aid decisions at this university. Could you first give me a general idea of how financial aid decisions are made at this university and then talk about the extent to which test scores influence some or all of these decisions?

Focus: Do you offer merit awards tied to test scores?

Focus: How does the role of test scores in financial award decisions affect awards to minority student applicants? How does it affect yield rates for minority students?

C. MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT

The next section of questions deals with marketing and recruitment issues.

I. Marketing

Question 1: First, let's focus on marketing. Could you describe to me any marketing programs that this university currently has in place?

Question 2: Could you describe the extent to which race plays a role in marketing?

Prompt: For example, are there specific brochures that position your university in a way that reflects the views or needs of specific racial groups?

Question 3: Could you talk about the extent to which test scores play a role in marketing?

Question 4: What role does financial aid play in marketing?

Question 5: Could you describe the link if any, between the marketing materials your institution produces and institutional mission?

II. Recruitment

Question 1: Now lets turn to the issue of recruitment. Could you describe your recruitment program to me?

Focus: How broad or targeted are your recruitment efforts? Are you trying to get applications up overall or in specific areas?

Focus: Do you have any relationships with particular high schools in this area or in other parts of the country where you do recruitment? How have they been chosen? Are a certain number of spaces set aside for these schools each year?

Question 2: What role does race play in recruitment?

Prompt: For example do you have admissions officers who specialize in the recruitment of minority students? What does their job involve?

Question 3: What role do test scores play in recruitment?

Prompt: For example do you employ test scores such as the PSAT to identify students you would like to attract to your applicant pool? How is the lower point on the test score range set?

Question 4: Could you speak about the role financial aid plays in the recruitment process and its relationship, if any, to test scores?

Question 5: Does your university offer athletic scholarships as a way to recruit promising athletes?

Focus: Is there overlap between this group and other targeted groups or categories of students?

Focus: How important are test scores and GPA in the award of these scholarships?

III. The Effects of External College Rankings

Finally, I'd like to focus on a particular source of market information on colleges – the college rankings publications.

Question 1: How do the rankings published by US News & World Report and others affect your university in general and the admission process in particular?

Focus: Could you describe any institutional advancement efforts that have been put in place in response to the rankings? How does the admission process fit into this?

Focus: How do the rankings affect the way you use test scores in the admission process?

Question 2: What is your view on the relationship between test scores and institutional prestige?

D. DIVERSITY

Thus far we have talked about the overall admission process as well as recruitment and marketing issues. Now, I'd like to ask you about a topic that often comes up in conversations about admissions – that is, the issue of diversity.

I. Operating Definition of Diversity

Question 1: We should start with defining what we mean by diversity. When talking about diversity at this university is there a formal operating definition that you use?

Focus: Does the university have specific diversity goals? Could you talk about them?

Prompt: For example, is race a specific consideration? Are gender and geographic location specific considerations?

II. The Role of Admissions in Achieving Diversity Goals

Question 1: How does the admission process assist your university's diversity goals in each of these areas?

Question 2: Do diversity goals affect the way you use test scores for particular groups of students?

Focus: How do the test scores of various sub-populations in your admitted pool compare to your majority population of students?

Focus: Does it affect the way financial aid is awarded?

III. **Diversity Goals and Recruitment (if not covered fully above)**

Question 1: Could you review the role of the university's diversity goals in your recruitment and marketing efforts?

E. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The final topic I'd like to discuss today is that of affirmative action and its effect on higher education admission decisions.

I. Stance on Affirmative Action in Higher Education

Question 1: If you had to locate this university along the continuum of attitudes that universities are taking towards affirmative action – from race being considered as an important factor in the admission process to race not being considered as a factor in the admission process – where would you position it?

Question 2: What kinds of conversations have there been at your institution about the role of affirmative action in admissions?

II. The Effects of Social Policy Trends on Admission Practices in the Past Few Years

Question 1: Could you talk about any particular policies, initiatives, or legal decisions that have had significant impact on your admission practices?

Focus: What was the nature of the impact?

Focus: Have legal concerns affected the way you recruit or admit minority students?

F. CONCLUDING ITEMS

I. **Thanks for Participation**

II. **Courtesy Review and Copy of Final Report Offers**

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANTS

OVERVIEW

A. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

I. Thanks for Participation and Assurance of Confidentiality

II. Overall Interview Structure and Logistics

B. ADMISSION FACTORS

I. Overview of the Admission Process

II. Special Categories of Admits

III. Initial Screening Factors

IV. The Role of Test Scores in Making Admission Decisions

C. RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING

I. Marketing

II. Recruitment

III. The Effects of External College Rankings

D. DIVERSITY

I. Operating Definition of Diversity

II. The Role of Admissions in Achieving Diversity Goals

III. Diversity Goals and Recruitment

E. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

I. Position on Affirmative Action in Higher Education

II. The Effects of Social Policy Trends on Admission Practices in the Past Few Years

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I. Thanks for Participation

II. Courtesy Review and Copy of Final Report Offers

A. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

I. **Thanks for Participation and Assurance of Confidentiality**

II. **Overall Interview Structure and Logistics**

B. ADMISSION FACTORS

I. **Overview of the Admission Process**

Question 1: To start, I'd like to learn about your background in the area of admissions consulting. How did you get started in this area?

Prompt: What changes have you seen over the years in your profession?

Prompt: What changes have you seen over the years in the institutions you work with?

Prompt: How would you characterize the institutions that form your current client base?

Question 2: In the interviews we will be conducting with individual institutions, we will ask them to take us through their admission process from start to finish – to give us a road map, so to speak, of their undergraduate admission process. Could you give me a map of the typical admission process. Does this process differ across different types of institutions – i.e. public/private, selective/non-selective?

Focus: Who tend to be the key figures involved in shaping overall admission policy at an institution?

Focus: To what extent does university mission seem to influence an institution's admission policy?

II. **Special Categories of Admits**

Question 1: I'd like you to talk a bit about the different admission categories that schools tend to use – e.g. legacy, athletes and any others that may be used to categorize applicants.

Focus: Which categories do schools tend to target or recruit aggressively?

Question 2: I have heard that some institutions may use a different admission process for students in certain admission categories (e.g. older students or students with learning disabilities). In your experience, have you found this to be the case? How does the process differ?

Focus: How do schools tend to deal with the test score information they obtain on these students?

Focus: Are their test scores used in computing the institutional average? Which person at an institution tends to decide how this will be handled?

III. Initial Screening Factors

Question 1: I'd like to return to the initial stages of the admission process – in particular the range of methods that schools use to do a first sort through their applicant pool. What factors tend to be used as screening devices at this stage of the admission process?

Focus: Do schools tend to use the same initial screening process for all students?

Focus: Do schools generally employ a test score,cut-off point at which they won't consider an applicant for admission? If so, do schools employ different cut-offs for different groups of students?

IV. The Role of Test Scores in Making Admission Decisions

I'd like once again to focus on a particular aspect of the admission process – in this case how test scores are interpreted and used in making admission and financial aid decisions.

Question 1: In reviewing applications, to what extent do institutions tend to rely on test scores to tell them whether a student is capable of doing work at their institution?

Focus: What other factors tend to be used when making this decision about a student?

Focus: Do schools tend to have a prediction equation that combines these factors? How might things generally be weighted?

Question 2: In general, to what extent do schools rely on test scores when evaluating a student's GPA?

Question 3: Most institutions seem to have an SAT-I or ACT test score range or average that they provide as information to prospective applicants. Do institutions tend to have an institutional average or range that they aim for on a yearly basis?

Focus: This range seems to remain relatively stable from year to year for most schools. How do schools keep a handle on how well they are achieving this range during the admission process?

Question 4: I'd like you to talk about the extent to which test scores influence financial aid and scholarship award decisions at different institutions.

Focus: How does the role of test scores in financial aid and scholarship award decisions tend to affect minority applicants? How does it affect yield rates for minority students?

C. MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT

The next section of questions deals with marketing and recruitment issues.

I. Marketing

Question 1: First, let's focus on marketing and then we'll deal with recruitment issues. Could you describe to me the types of marketing programs that institutions tend to use?

Question 2: Could you describe the extent to which race plays a role in marketing?

Question 3: Could you talk about the extent to which test scores play a role in institutional marketing?

Question 4: What role does financial aid tend to play in marketing?

Question 5: Could you describe the link if any, between the marketing materials an institution produces and institutional mission?

II. Recruitment

Question 1: Now lets turn to the issue of recruitment. Could you describe the types of recruitment programs that institutions use?

Focus: Do schools try to get applications up overall or in specific areas?

Focus: Do schools tend to have relationships with particular high schools in areas of the country where they do recruitment? How do institutions choose these schools? Do institutions tend to set aside a certain number of spaces for these schools each year?

Question 2: What role does race tend to play in recruitment?

Prompt: For example do schools have admissions officers who specialize in the recruitment of minority students? What does their job involve?

Question 3: What role do test scores tend to play in recruitment?

Prompt: For example do schools employ test scores such as the PSAT to identify students they would like to attract to their applicant pool? How is the lower point on the test score range set by these institutions?

Question 4: Could you speak about the role financial aid tends to play in the recruitment process and its relationship, if any, to test scores?

Question 5: How important are test scores and GPA in the award of athletic scholarships at various institutions?

III. The Effects of External College Rankings

I'd like to focus on a particular source of market information on colleges – the college rankings publications.

Question 1: How do the rankings published by US News & World Report and others affect schools?

Focus: Could you describe any institutional advancement efforts that schools you work with have put in place in response to these rankings?

Focus: How do the rankings affect the way test scores are used in the admission process?

Question 2: What is your view on the relationship between test scores and institutional prestige?

D. DIVERSITY

Thus far we have talked about the overall admission process as well as recruitment and marketing issues. Now, I'd like to ask you about a topic that often comes up in conversations about admissions – that is, the issue of diversity.

I. Operating Definition of Diversity

Question 1: Perhaps we can start by defining what we mean by diversity. When talking about diversity is there a formal operating definition that you use or institutions you work with tend to use?

Focus: Do universities tend to have specific diversity goals? Could you give me some examples?

II. The Role of Admissions in Achieving Diversity Goals

Question 1: How does the admission process tend to assist a university's diversity goals?

Question 2: How can diversity goals affect the way test scores are used for particular groups of students?

Focus: Do diversity goals tend to affect the way financial aid is awarded at institutions?

E. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The final topic I'd like to discuss today is that of affirmative action and its effect on higher education admission decisions.

I. XU's stance on Affirmative Action in Higher Education

Question 1: If you had to locate the average institution that you work with along the continuum of attitudes that universities are taking towards affirmative action – from race being considered as an important factor in the admission process to race not being considered as a factor in the admission process – where would you position this average institution?

Question 2: What kinds of conversations have you had with institutions about the role of affirmative action in admissions?

II. The Effects of Social Policy Trends on Admission Practices in the Past Few Years

Question 1: Could you talk about any particular policies, initiatives, or legal decisions that seem to have had a significant impact on admission practices?

Focus: What has been the nature of the impact?

Focus: Have legal concerns affected the way minority students are recruited or admitted in general?

F. CONCLUDING ITEMS

I. Thanks for Participation

II. Courtesy Review and Copy of Final Report Offers

notes

1 Bowen, W., and Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

2 Nettles, M., Perna, L., and Millett, C. (1998). Race and testing in college admissions. In G. Orfield and E. Miller (Eds.), *Chilling admissions: The affirmative action crisis and the search for alternatives* (pp.97-110). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

3 Bowen, W., and Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

4 See also Koretz, D., Russell, M., Shin, D., Horn, C., and Shasby, K. (2001). *Testing and diversity in postsecondary education: The case of California*. Chestnut Hill, MA: National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy.

5 Koretz, D. (2000). *The impact of score differences on the admission of minority students: An illustration*. Chestnut Hill, MA: National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy.

6 As an example of the minority/non-minority test score gap, consider results for the 1996 SAT-I: only 12.1 percent (25,406) of blacks and 20.3 percent (33,246) of Hispanics achieved a combined score of 1100 or higher, compared to 41 percent (563,739) of whites and 45 percent (75,871) of Asian Americans. A considerable body of research has explored the possibility of bias in these and other admission tests, and has not substantiated the claim that test bias accounts for these disparities (see Jencks, C., 1998, Racial bias in testing, in C. Jencks and M. Phillips (Eds.), *The black-white test score gap*, pp. 55-85, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).

7 Breland, H., Maxey, J., McLure, G., Valiga, M., Boatwright, M., Ganley, V., and Jenkins, L. (1995). *Challenges in college admissions: A report of a survey of undergraduate admission policies, practices, and procedures*. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, American College Testing, The College Board, Educational Testing Service, and National Association of College Admission Counselors.

8 A common misconception about the SAT-I, ACT, and other standardized admission tests is that they are precisely calibrated. Although scores often fluctuate for students who take a test more than once, even very small differences will seem significant if the measure is regarded as very precise. This misconception contributes to misunderstandings in discussions of fairness. Test scores are often used to support claims that an admission decision was unfair; that is, if Student A's score was higher than Student B's, admitting Student B but not Student A was unfair.

9 Breland, H., Maxey, J., McLure, G., Valiga, M., Boatwright, M., Ganley, V., and Jenkins, L. (1995). *Challenges in college admissions: A report of a survey of undergraduate admission policies, practices, and procedures*. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, American College Testing, The College Board, Educational Testing Service, and National Association of College Admission Counselors.

10 Orfield, G., and Miller, E., (Eds.) (1998). *Chilling admissions: The affirmative action crisis and the search for alternatives*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

11 Orfield, G. (1998). Campus resegregation and its alternatives. In G. Orfield and E. Miller (Eds.), *Chilling admissions: The affirmative action crisis and the search for alternatives*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

12 Carnevale, A., and Fry, R. (2000). *Crossing the great divide: Can we achieve equity when generation Y goes to college?* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

13 Texas admits the top 10 percent of each graduating class and Florida the top 20 percent. The top 4 percent of each graduating class in California is granted automatic eligibility to the University of California system, which means they are guaranteed admission to at least one university in the system. Texas implemented its percent rule for the fall 1998 entering class, Florida implemented its percent rule for fall 2000 admissions, and California's is set to begin for the class entering in 2001.

14 An admissions director at a most selective private institution described the distinction between marketing and recruitment as follows: "Marketing is broader. It has to do with the reputation of the institution, the profile, how its presented to the world in general, whereas recruitment is more dealing directly with students, trying to get them to apply and come."

15 For more information on institutional rankings in general, and the US News and World Report rankings in particular, see Clarke, M. (2000). *Quantifying quality: Technical issues surrounding US News and World Report's rankings of US colleges and graduate programs*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston College, Chestnut Hill.

16 Most of the standardized tests required for college admission were developed to predict how students would do in college. In other words, the higher the test score, the better the grades a student is expected to earn. The accuracy of this prediction can vary. For example, the SAT-I and ACT were both developed to predict first-year grades in college. In general, they do this, but some applicants with high scores get lower than expected first-year grades, and some who score low get higher than expected first-year grades. In fact, research shows that the correlation between test scores and first-year grades is about +0.45 (a perfect positive relationship – meaning that as test scores increase, grades increase - would be +1.0). Another way of saying this is that the test score, on average, accounts for about 20 percent of what affects first-year grades. Other factors (e.g., student motivation, type of courses taken, academic support services on campus) account for about 80 percent. Research also shows that other applicant information such as high school GPA or rank in class can be as effective as test scores in predicting grades. Because of this, some schools do not use test scores when making admission decisions, relying instead on other sources of information.

17 The admissions directors and consultants focused mainly on the roles of test scores and diversity characteristics in financial aid and scholarship award decisions for students with demonstrated need. The roles of test scores and diversity characteristics for students without demonstrated need were discussed only in the context of scholarships.

18 National Research Council (1999). *Myths and tradeoffs: The role of tests in undergraduate admissions*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

19 Ibid., p.1.

20 Ibid.

21 Schemo, J. (February 17, 2001). Head of U. of California seeks to end SAT use in admissions. *New York Times*.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

About the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy

Created as an independent monitoring system for assessment in America, the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy is located in the Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch School of Education at Boston College. The National Board provides research-based test information for policy decision making, with special attention to groups historically underserved by the educational systems of our country. Specifically, the National Board

- Monitors testing programs, policies, and products
- Evaluates the benefits and costs of testing programs in operation
- Assesses the extent to which professional standards for test development and use are met in practice

This National Board publication series is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy
Lynch School of Education, Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Telephone: (617)552-4521 • Fax: (617)552-8419
Email: nbetpp@bc.edu

Visit our website at **nbetpp.bc.edu** for more articles, the latest educational news, and information on NBETPP.

NBETPP

The Board of Overseers

Paul LeMahieu
Superintendent of Education
State of Hawaii

Peter Lynch
Vice Chairman
Fidelity Management and Research

Antonia Hernandez
President and General Counsel
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Harold Howe II
Former U.S. Commissioner of Education

Gail Snowden
Managing Director, Community Banking
FleetBoston Financial

Faith Smith
President
Native American Educational Services

Peter Stanley
President
Pomona College

Donald Stewart
President and CEO
The Chicago Community Trust

BOSTON COLLEGE

HE034845

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: The Roles of Testing and Diversity in College Admissions	
Author(s): Marguerite Clarke and Arnold Shore	
Corporate Source: National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, Boston College	Publication Date: March 2001

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: Marguerite Clarke	Printed Name/Position/Title: Marguerite Clarke, Assistant Professor	
Organization/Address: National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, Boston College Chestnut Hill, MA 024	Telephone: 617-552-0665	FAX: 617-552-8419
	E-Mail Address: clarkemd@bc.edu	Date: April 2002

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
1129 SHRIVER LAB
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742-5701
ATTN: ACQUISITIONS

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2000)